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CHARLES BONNET, F.R.S.

Published by W. Woodward, Philad.ª

PHILOSOPHICAL AND CRITICAL

INQUIRIES

CONCERNING

CHRISTIANITY.

BY

M. CHARLES BONNET,

OF GENEVA, F. R. S.

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF PARIS, &c. &c.

TRANSLATED BY

JOHN LEWIS BOISSIER, Esq.

Philadelphia:

Printed and Published by W. W. WOODWARD, and for sale at his book-store, lately occupied by Mr. WILLIAM YOUNG, N°. 52, corner of Second and Chesnut-streets.

1803.

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PREFACE

OF THE

TRANSLATOR.

*MR. CHARLES BONNET, of Geneva, from whose works I have selected and translated this volume, is not of the Clerical profession, but is a gentleman of independent fortune. He is held in the highest esteem in the literary world, as a metaphysician, philosopher, and explorer of nature. His deep views, and the light he has thrown on various subjects, give him an undoubted claim to the reputation he enjoys.**

* A complete and new edition of Mr. Bonnet's works was published in 1779, at Neufchatel, in 10 vols. 4to. and 18 vols. 8vo.—The contents of the 8vo. edition are as follows:

Treatise of Insectology - - -	1 vol.
Various Observations on Insects - -	1
Memoirs of Natural History - - -	1
Inquiries concerning the use of Leaves -	1
Considerations on Organized Bodies -	2
Contemplations of Nature - - -	3
Writings on Natural History - -	2
Letters on various Subjects of Natural History - - - - - - -	1
Analytical Essay on the Faculties of the Soul	2
Essay on Psychology - - - -	1

The present work represents Christianity in a philosophical point of view, which cannot but deeply impress every mind disposed to meditation.

In this sceptical and paradoxical age, an ostentatious display of erudition—every alluring and fascinating grace of style—every specious argument, calculated to misguide the unwary—have been employed to undermine our holy religion. It must therefore be a source of infinite satisfaction, to those who sincerely search after truth, to see the man of genius, the man of learning and deep reflection, stand forth to combat and repel those ungenerous attacks on the happiness of society in general, and of every individual impressed with the sublime doctrine and comfortable truths contained in Divine revelation.

A respectable Prelate of our church first traced out to me (by the most weighty arguments, and in the most persuasive language) the road which leads to truth. A serious and close perusal of the following Inquiries, confirmed my belief in Chris-*

Philosophical Palingenesis - -	2
Miscellaneous - - - - - -	1
	18

* The Bishop of Chester.—A sermon of his, which I accidentally heard at Bath, and afterwards the perusal of his printed discourses, produced the effect above mentioned.

tianity; and it will afford me the most heart-felt pleasure, if others should derive the same advantage from them.

A translation of this nature was no easy task to me; and, I fear, frequent Gallicisms, and inaccuracies of style, will occur. My chief endeavours were to adhere strictly to the text, except in those particular instances where I have apologized, and assigned my reasons for deviating from it.*

* The volume which I present to the public, was detached from the Philos. Palingenesis, and printed separately, in 1770.—In the last edition of Mr. Bonnet's Works, the *Inquiries into Christianity* are contained in his Philos. Palingenesis, and form the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st parts; to these I have added a part of the 17th, which Mr. B. has intitled *Introduction to the Inquiries.* The preface was in the first edition, 1770, and has been suppressed in the last complete edition.

BATH, 1787.

PREFACE

OF THE

AUTHOR.

IT was one great object of my attention, in these Inquiries, not to admit as essential, whatever might be reasonably objected to in sound philosophy. I therefore set out from those facts alone which are the best attested, and from these I have only drawn the most direct and immediate conclusions. I have not spoken of *demonstration*, but of *probability* only. I have not supposed any one to be an unbeliever; the words *incredulous*, and *incredulity*, are not even mentioned in my book. The objections of various kinds, which I have discussed, have arisen from the nature of my subject, and I have raised these objections against myself. I have carefully avoided controversy; desirous that these Inquiries might be read and approved by all Christian societies. I have been also very cautious not to treat of doctrines;—far be it from

me to offend any particular sect;—but I have enlarged somewhat on the beauty and excellence of the Christian doctrines.

I have not equally enlarged upon every proof; but I have pointed them out, and have principally applied myself to those which the Miracles furnish.

The readers to whom I chiefly address myself, are those, whose doubts proceed from an honest heart; who have endeavoured to remove and settle those doubts, and to solve objections, but have not succeeded in their endeavours. I could not, neither ought I, to address myself to those whose understandings are perverted by the depravity of their hearts.

Among the many arguments which I have produced, there are some which I cannot claim as my own; a subject which, for these eighteen centuries, has been treated by the greatest and most learned men, did not admit of much novelty. My chief aim has been to discover a compendious, a more certain and more philosophical method to compass the great design I had in view.

I have endeavoured to link my propositions so closely to each other, as to leave no chasm between them; and herein, perhaps the nature of

my plan has been of greater assistance to me than all my efforts: I easily foresaw that my ideas would naturally, and of themselves, be connected with each other, and that the thread of my meditations would lead me on.

I must be allowed this remark:—Most authors whom I have read (and they are not few,) seem to me to have fallen into two essential mistakes—They are continually speaking of *demonstration*, and unceasingly apostrophizing those whom they call Deists and Unbelievers. It were better to promise less; this method creates, and merits more confidence. It were better not to apostrophize unbelievers: the object is to enlighten, and to persuade them, not to indispose them at first setting out.

If unbelievers adopt an offensive and unbecoming style toward Christians, it is no reason why these should employ the same offensive language.

In almost every author whose works have engaged my studies and meditation, I have observed another mistake, which is, that they are over-fond of dissertation;—they do not apply themselves sufficiently to close reasoning; they are, in short, too diffuse.

By enlarging, they weaken their arguments, and thus give objections a stronger hold. Sometimes to the most solid arguments, they join trivial heterogeneous reflections, which weaken the former. In the construction of a stately marble temple erected to Truth, base materials ought not to be employed.

The earnest desire of proving too much, has induced several very estimable apologists to advance, with too much confidence, certain considerations inadmissible in sound logic.

I have taken the utmost pains to avoid these mistakes. I do not flatter myself so far, as to imagine that I have always succeeded: my abilities are not great, but I have exerted them to their utmost extent; I have concentrated on this sublime subject all the powers of my soul. I have not *numbered* the arguments; I have *weighed* them in the scale of sound logic. My desire was to render this important inquiry as interesting as possible. I have adapted my style to the various objects which I had to describe; or, to speak properly, the tints of these objects have imperceptibly given a colouring to my style.

The subject raised all the affections of my soul; and I was desirous of exciting the same sensations in my readers. I aimed at an ex-

treme precision, cautious, at the same time, that it should not render my style obscure. I have not affected an erudition to which I am no ways entitled. It is easier to appear learned, than to be really so. I have pointed out the true sources of information, they are in general well known.

True philosophers will be my judges; if I obtain their approbation, I shall consider it as an honourable reward of my labours. But, there exists a reward of a still higher value, to which I aspire, and this reward is independent of the judgment of man.

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PHILOSOPHICAL AND CRITICAL *INQUIRIES* CONCERNING CHRISTIANITY.

BOOK I.

CHAP. I.

ON THE ORDER AND LAWS OF NATURE, AND THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE FIRST CAUSE.

THAT there exists, distinct from the universe, a supreme intelligent cause of that universe, is a truth, which no reasonable and thinking man can controvert or deny. It is a truth obvious even to sense, it is conformable to the most natural sentiments of the human mind, it is established by the universal consent of almost the whole

human race, it is consonant to the clearest principles and the most sublime discoveries of natural philosophy, and has been proved by a variety of the most convincing arguments, which have never yet been, and we may venture to assert never can be confuted.

I shall not therefore take up any of the reader's time, in attempting to prove the existence of a first cause; * I shall only observe, that this first cause, must be *self-existent*, must exist by an absolute necessity in its own nature; if it did not it would depend on another cause; and if this were not *necessary*, it would depend on a third cause, &c.; and I should fall into an absurd progression of causes, or rather of effects, ad infinitum. The cause therefore of the universe exists of itself: its essence is to

* The translator has omitted the two first chapters of the original, on THE IMMATERIALITY OF THE SOUL, and THE BEING OF A GOD; both which subjects the author has treated with his usual ingenuity and force of argument. But in this country, where there are few, if any, materialists or atheists, it seemed unnecessary to enter upon the proof of truths so generally acknowledged. Besides which it was the translator's professed design to confine himself solely to those parts of the author's work which relate to Christianity, or were indispensably necessary to *introduce the subject.*

exist; and whatever is, derives its existence from it.

I pretend not to penetrate into the nature of that *cause*, or to decide what *necessary existence* is, in itself: How should I attain to such knowledge? I who am bewildered, confounded by an atom, and who cannot arrive at the intimate knowledge of any one being! But I am constrained to admit, that *that cause*, whatever be the mode of its being, possesses whatever is requisite for the production of that sublime effect, which I call the *universe*. I therefore study this effect, and attempt to arrive at some philosophical notions concerning the attributes of this *cause*. I first observe, that this *necessary cause* enjoys the greatest power that it is possible for me to conceive; for can I conceive any power greater than the power of *creating?* The universe exists; and yet it is in its very nature contingent; it has not therefore existed for ever; what a power must that be, which called it from nothing into being, and which has given an actual existence to every thing that was possible!

When I turn my attention to that assemblage of things, which I distinguish by the general word nature, I perceive that this assemblage is an admirable system of various relations; and the more I repeat my observations, the more I see these relations, multiplied, diversified, and extended; I am soon convinced, that every thing is carried on in nature conformably to settled laws, which are no other than the natural result of these relations, that link together all these beings, and direct them to one common end.

It is true, that I do not perceive any necessary connexion between one moment and that which succeeds, between the action of one being and that of another being, between the present state of a being and its state in succeeding moments, &c. But I am so constituted, that *what* I have always observed to happen, and what all those who came before me have observed to happen, appears to me to be a moral certainty. Therefore, it will never enter into my imagination to form the least doubt, that the sun will not rise to-morrow, that the buds of trees will not blossom in spring, or that fire will not reduce *wood to* ashes, &c.

I confess that my opinion is here purely analogical : * since it is very evident, that the contrary of that, which I think will happen, is still possible; but this simple possibility cannot in the least counterbalance in my mind that multitude of constant *experiences*, on which my analogical belief is established.

It seems to me, that I should do violence to common sense, if I refused to take analogy for my guide in things of this nature. I should lead a life of misery, I should not even be able to provide for my own preservation. For, if the knowledge I have of the aliments which have always nourished me, were not sufficient to establish the certainty I have, that these aliments will not suddenly, and without cause, be changed into poison, how should I venture to eat of them again?

* When I have examined separately a certain number of things, and have constantly found in all of them, the same essential properties, I think I am authorized to draw this inference; that the things which appear to me precisely similar to them (but which I have not examined with the same attention) are also endowed with the same properties. This manner of judging is styled by logicians *analogy*.

Reason therefore compels me to admit, that there exists in nature a certain constant order, on which I may establish opinions, which, though not demonstrations, carry a sufficient probability to satisfy my wants.

My senses manifest this order to me; the faculty I possess of reflection, discovers to me its most essential consequences.

In my apprehension, therefore, the order of nature is the general result of the * relations which I perceive between beings.

I view these relations as invariable, because I have never seen them, neither has any one ever seen them to vary naturally.

The intelligence of the first cause may be reasonably deduced from the contemplation of these relations; because the greater number and variety of parts there are in a *whole*, all concurring to a common end, the greater is the probability that this *whole* is not the

* By these relations I understand, in general, those properties, those determinations, *by the means* of which different beings are directed to the same end, or concur to produce a certain effect. *Anal. Essay, sect. 40.*

work of a blind cause; because, as I have satisfied myself that matter is contingent, and that motion is not essential to matter, I can place, neither in matter nor in motion, the efficient *reason* of that which *is*; because assigning the efficient *reason* of a thing, is not simply giving a *cause* to that thing, it is assigning a principle by which one may clearly conceive why that thing is, and for what reason it is *as* it is, and not otherwise. Now, it is only in an intelligent self-existing cause, that I find sufficient reason for the mode of being of the universe; and it is only in the power of the first necessary cause that I find the efficient reason of the existence, or of the actuality of the universe.

If the laws of nature result essentially from the relations which exist between various beings *; if these relations, considered in themselves, do *not* exist necessarily; it appears to me that I may hence conclude, that nature has a legislator. Light has not bestowed on itself the properties of light, and its laws of refraction and reflec-

* The laws of nature are in general the result, or the consequences of the relations which exist between beings. Ann. Essay, par. 40.

tion are the result of the relations it bears to different bodies, either fluid * or solid.

I should not therefore express myself with accuracy, if I said that the laws of nature have adapted the means to the end.† Because, the laws of nature are only simple effects; and, according to my ideas, effects suppose a cause; or, to speak in other words, the actual existence of a thing supposes the relative existence of another thing, which I consider as the reason of the existence of the first.

If nature has received laws, he who has imposed those laws on nature has, without doubt, the power of suspending, modifying, or directing those laws as he pleases.

But if the legislator of nature be as wise as he is powerful, he will neither suspend

* Light propagates itself in a straight line. Its refraction is that property, by means of which its rays are bent in passing from one medium into another medium of a different nature; viz. from air into water, or from water into air. The reflection of light is that property by which it reverberates, or appears to reverberate, from bodies. Experience *discovers* these properties, and their laws. Geometry *calculates* them.

† *Encyclopedia of Paris*, on the word, *Leaves of Plants*.

nor modify those laws, unless they be in themselves insufficient to fulfil the views of his wisdom; for wisdom consists as much in not multiplying the means without necessity, as in the choice of the best means to arrive at the best end.

Now I cannot doubt the wisdom of the legislator of nature, because I cannot doubt the intelligence of that legislator. I observe that the more man becomes enlightened, the more traces he discovers in the universe of a creative intelligence. I remark even, with astonishment, that this intelligence is not displayed with less splendor in the structure of a mite, or a worm, than in that of man, or in the disposition or the motions of celestial bodies.

I therefore conceive, that the intelligence which has been able to form the immense plan of the universe, is at least the most perfect of intelligences.

But this intelligence is inherent in a *necessarily existent being;* a *necessarily existent being* is not only that being which cannot but be, it is also that being which cannot be in any other manner. But a be-

ing whose perfections were susceptible of improvement, would not be a *necessarily existent being*, since it might then be otherwise than it is. From this argument, then, I infer that the perfections of the *necessarily existent being*, are not susceptible of improvement, and that they are *absolutely that* which they *are*. I say *absolutely*, because I cannot conceive degrees in these perfections of a *necessarily existent being*.

I clearly see, that a limited being may be determined in many different ways, because I clearly conceive the possibility of change in its limits.

If the necessarily existent being possess an intelligence without limits, it will also enjoy an unlimited wisdom; for, wisdom is properly here the intelligence itself, inasmuch as it proposes an end, and the means relative to that end.

Wisdom, therefore, appears in all the works of the creative intelligence; it has proposed to itself the best possible end in the creation of every being, and it has predetermined the best means to arrive at that *end.*

CHAP. II.

THE LOVE OF HAPPINESS THE BASIS OF THE NATURAL LAWS OF MAN.—CONSEQUENCE IN FAVOUR OF THE PERFECTION OF THE MORAL SYSTEM.——THE LAWS OF NATURE THE LANGUAGE OF THE LEGISLATOR.

I AM a sensitive and intelligent being; the desire of existing agreeably is inherent in the nature of every sensitive and intelligent being, and it is that strong desire which constitutes self-love. Self-love, therefore, does not differ from the love of happiness.

I cannot but perceive that the love of happiness is the universal principle of my actions.

Happiness, therefore, is the great end of my being. I did not make myself; I did not give to myself that universal principle of action. The author of my existence, who has placed within me that powerful principle, has then created me for happiness.

By happiness, I understand, in general, whatever can contribute to the preservation or perfection of my nature.

Because perceptible objects make a strong impression on me, and my intelligence is very limited, it happens frequently that I mistake happiness, and that I prefer an apparent to a real happiness.

These mistakes are discovered to me by my daily experience, and by my reflections, the result of this experience. I perceive, then, that to attain the end of my being, I am under a strict obligation to observe the laws of my being.

I therefore consider these laws as the natural means which the author of my being has chosen to conduct me to happiness.* As they are the necessary result of my relations to different beings, and I have not the faculty of changing these relations, I manifestly see, that I cannot infringe either more or less the laws of my particular nature, without departing more or less from my true end.

* Vide part xv. ch. iv.—Vide also part viii. ch. iii.

Experience proves to me, that all my faculties are confined within certain natural limits, and that there is a point where pleasure ends, and pain begins. Thus by experience I am taught, that I must regulate the exercise of all my faculties according to their natural capacity.

I am therefore under a philosophical obligation to acknowledge, that there is a natural sanction of the laws of my being, since I experience pain whenever I transgress these laws.

Because I love myself, and I cannot but desire to be happy, I cannot but desire also the continuation of my existence. I perceive these same desires in all my fellow-creatures; and if some seem to wish for the cessation of their being, it is rather a change in their being, than the annihilation of it, which they desire.

My reason represents it to me as very probable, that death will not be the final period of my being: it discovers to me, although imperfectly, physical pre-ordained means which may prolong personality beyond the

grave: it assures me that I am a being capable of endless advancements towards perfection. By the continual progress which in my present state I am able to make towards virtue and truth, it teaches me to judge of those improvements which I may make in another state, wherein all my faculties will be perfected. Finally, from those philosophical notions which reason forms of the divine attributes and natural laws, it deduces new considerations, which add greatly to these different probabilities.

But reason discovers to me, at the same time, that it is not within the compass of my present faculties to allow me more than simple probabilities as to existence after death.* Nevertheless, my reason itself makes me perceive most forcibly how much it would contribute to my happiness, to have *more* than *simple probabilities* respecting my future state, at least such an aggregate of probabilities, as would be equivalent to what I call *moral certainty*. My reason furnishes me with the best proofs of the supreme intelligence of the author of my existence. It deduces very fairly from that

* Vide part xvi. ch. ii.

intelligence the supreme WISDOM of that great Being.* His goodness will be that same WISDOM employed in procuring the greatest happiness of every sentient and every intelligent being. This adorable WISDOM having introduced into its place the system of human nature, must undoubtedly have willed every thing that could contribute to the greatest perfection of that system. Now nothing could more assuredly be fitter to produce the greatest perfection of this system, than to give to those beings of which it is composed a moral certainty of their future state, and to lead them to consider the happiness they will enjoy in that state, as a consequence of the moral perfection which they have endeavoured to attain in their present state.

And since the actual state of humanity did not admit that the sole strength of reason should be sufficient to convince man of a future state, it was undoubtedly consistent with the character of infinite WISDOM, to give him by some other means an assurance so necessary to the perfection of the moral system.

* Vide part vi. ch. iii.

But, because the plan of WISDOM required, that intelligent but very limited beings, such as men, should inhabit the earth, it could not alter the faculties of these beings, so as to give them a sufficient certainty of their future state.

It was therefore necessary for WISDOM to employ in this design a means of such a nature that, though not included within the actual sphere of the human faculties, it should at the same time be so well adapted to the nature, and to the most rational exercise of those faculties, that man might, by this new means, acquire the degree of certainty which he wanted, and so anxiously sought after.

It was then from the hand of the supreme Being alone that man could receive this so desirable certainty. But what particular method could the *supreme* WISDOM take to convince man of the great design projected for him? By what particular sign could man be assured that divine WISDOM itself had spoken?

I have admitted that nature has a legislator, and to admit this, is admitting at the same time that this legislator can suspend or modify, at his will, the laws which he has given to nature.

These laws are therefore in some sort the language of the author of nature, or the physical expression of his will.

I therefore easily conceive, that the author of nature may have employed this language to make known to men with certainty that which it was of the utmost consequence for them to know, and to know well; and that which reason alone was not able to discover to them.

Thus, because I evidently see that the legislator of nature can alone modify its laws, I think myself authorized in reason to admit, that *he has* spoken, whenever I can be reasonably convinced that certain striking modifications of these laws have taken place, and can clearly discover the design of these modifications.

I shall consider, therefore, these modifications as particular signs of the *will* of the author of nature with respect to man.

I shall give a name to these species of modification, were it only to point out the alterations they have effected contrary to the ordinary course of nature, and shall call them miracles.

BOOK II.

CHAP. I.

TESTIMONY:——THE NATURE AND FOUNDATIONS OF TESTIMONY.——MORAL ORDER.

ON this subject a question of some importance presents itself for our examination—How am I to be convinced that the great legislator of nature has spoken? Is it not reasonable, it may be said, previously to enquire wherefore the legislator *has not spoken to* ME? The answer is plain—Every individual might claim an equal right to that favour; and to satisfy the desires of every one, extraordinary evidences must have been varied and multiplied in a relative proportion to these desires. But, by this excessive multiplication, extraordinary evidences would have lost the nature

of miracles; and that which, in the order of divine WISDOM, ought to have been extraordinary, would appear no more than the common course of nature.

I must also acknowledge that I am so constituted, that my senses and reflection are to be my guides.—An inward revelation, which constantly effected in me the strongest persuasion of a future state, would not be consistent with my nature, and the general state of my earthly existence.

I could not exist in all times and all places; I could not possibly see, touch, hear, and examine every thing with my own senses.

It concerns me however to know the truth, or at least the probabilities of things, which happened long before my existence, or in very distant places.

The intention therefore of the author of my existence, with respect to these things, is, that I should rely on the evidence of those who have been witnesses, and have transmitted either oral or written testimonies.

In this respect, my conduct rests on a consideration, which to me appears very rational; namely, that I must suppose others to enjoy the same essential faculties which I perceive in myself; this supposition is, I confess, merely analogical. But I can easily be convinced, that analogy in this case is of equal force as in every other case resting on common and constant experience. Is it necessary to search so deeply into the nature of my fellow-creatures, to be certain that they have the same senses and the same faculties which I myself enjoy?

From these arguments, therefore, I draw this plain inference, that those things, which I should have seen, heard, examined, and touched, had I existed in certain times and in certain places, may have been seen, heard, examined, and touched by those who did exist in those times and in those places.

If moreover it be admitted that these things were capable of interesting very strongly the minds of the spectators, it must also be admitted, that they have been strict-

ly investigated; for it must be allowed that the conduct of these persons, on certain important occasions, was determined by the same motives by which I should myself have been determined: it seems to me that I should act contrary to the most positive rules of analogy*, if I judged otherwise. I speak only of those things which require eyes, ears, and a sound judgment.

But as testimony is founded on analogy, it can only admit of a moral certainty. There can be no necessary chain between the manner in which I should have been affected or should have acted, in such and such circumstances, and that manner in which the beings, which I believe similar to myself, have been affected or have acted in the same circumstances;—the circumstances themselves can never be perfectly the same; the subjects are too complicated; besides, the judgment which I form on the relation of the resemblance which these beings bear to myself is still analogical. But, if I believed those things only of which I have been a witness, my incredulity would necessarily expose me to a most painful

* Vide Part i. Chap. iii. Note 1st.

state of existence, and I should be utterly unacquainted with a multitude of things immediately connected with my present happiness; besides, experience and reflection furnish me with rules whereby I form a sound judgment concerning the validity of testimony: I am taught by both, that in numberless cases I may adhere to testimony, without incurring the risk of being deceived.

The same reasons therefore which have induced me to admit a certain order in the physical world *, induce me to admit a certain order in the moral world. This moral order essentially results from the nature of the human faculties, and the relations they bear to the things that determine the exercise of these faculties.

The opinions I form concerning moral order cannot admit a perfect certainty, because, in every particular determination of the will, the contrary is always possible, since the activity of the will may be extended to an indefinite number of cases.

* Vide Part i. Chap. iii.

But I cannot suppose that a man of sound judgment will act in any particular case as a madman would, although there is a possibility that he may. It is therefore only probable that he will not; and that probability I must allow to be sufficient for me to establish a sound and solid judgment, adapted to the purposes of my present condition.

As to those things, therefore, which I could neither feel, see, hear, nor examine myself, because the distance of times and places was an obstacle; the probability of these things, I say, will increase, in proportion to the number of witnesses, of witnesses deserving belief, and in proportion also to the circumstantiality and harmony of their evidence, although not precisely similar to each other.

CHAP. II.

OF THE CREDIBILITY OF TESTIMONY:—ITS ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS:—APPLICATION TO THE EVIDENCE OF THE GOSPEL.

IF I consider certainty as a whole, and make an ideal division of it into parts or degrees, these parts or degrees will be parts or degrees of certainty.

These ideal divisions of certainty I call *probabilities*; the relation therefore which the parts bear to the whole will give me the degrees of certainty.

I do not say that the probability of a thing increases in proportion to the number of witnesses who attest it; but I say that the probability of a thing increases by the number of witnesses, according to a certain proportion, which the mathematician attempts

to reduce to calculation. To form a proper judgment of the witnesses, two general and essential conditions are required—their capacity, and integrity. The first of these conditions will depend on their bodily and intellectual faculties.—The degree of probity and disinterestedness will determine the other.

This must on the whole be finally determined by experience (which is the reiteration of facts, and of particular facts, by which we become acquainted with the moral character).

To apply therefore the same fundamental principles to oral and written tradition, the last of which is of greater force and credibility than the former, this credibility will encrease by the concurrence of different copies of the same evidence; these copies I consider as so many links of the same chain; and a succession of copies I shall view in the light of so many collateral chains, which will encrease in such a manner the probability of the written tradition, that it will indefinitely approach to a certainty, and will far surpass that which the testimony of

many ocular witnesses might give. God is the author of moral as well as of natural order. I have found two kinds of dispensation in natural order *: the first, that which determines the *ordinary* course of nature; the second, that which determines those *extraordinary* events, which I call *miracles*.

The first has in view the happiness of all sensitive beings in our globe.

The second has in view the happiness of man alone, because man is the only being on earth who can judge of that dispensation, consider its end, apply it to himself, and direct his actions relatively to that end. That particular dispensation must therefore be adapted to the faculties of man, and to the various methods by which he may exercise them here below, and form a judgment of things.

It is to man that the author of nature chose to speak: He conformed his language therefore to the nature of that being whom

* Vide Part i. Chap. v. and vi.

his goodness chose to instruct; his plan of wisdom did not admit that he should change the nature of that being, and give to him on earth the faculties of an angel. But infinite WISDOM, without making an angel of man, had pre-ordained means, by which he might arrive at a reasonable certainty of that which was of the highest importance for him to know. Man is endowed with various intellectual faculties; the sum of these faculties constitutes what we call reason.

If it were the will of God not to force man into belief—if he chose only to speak to his reason, this was acting with man as with an intelligent being. He must therefore have spoken to him a language adapted to his reason; and it must be his will that he should apply his reason to the explanation of that language, as to the sublimest inquiry which could occupy his intellectual faculties.

The nature of that language being such as could not be addressed to every individual *, it was necessary for the supreme legislator to adapt it to those natural means

* *Vide the beginning* of Chap. i. of this Part.

by which human reason arrives at the conviction or moral certainty of past events, and becomes also convinced of the order and species of those events. These natural means are what is expressed by the word *testimony*: But testimony always supposes *facts*; the language of the supreme legislator has then been a *language of facts*, and of particular facts. But testimony is confined to rules, which are established by reason, and by which reason judges; the language of the legislator has then been subordinate to these rules.

The foundation of the belief of man concerning his future destiny has therefore been reduced thus by the author of man to proofs of *facts*, to palpable proofs, and such as are within reach of the most confined and limited capacity.

Because testimony supposes facts, it implies senses which perceive those facts, and transmit them to the soul without alteration. The senses themselves are necessarily connected with intellect, which judges of facts,

for the senses (being wholly material) cannot judge.

I call *palpable* facts, those of which plain common sense is able to judge, or concerning which we have a thorough conviction that there is no mistake.

Good sense, or common sense, will be that degree of understanding requisite to judge of such facts; but as the most palpable facts may be either altered or disguised by imposture, or by interested motives; an avowed probity and disinterestedness must be required in the testimony of those who give an account of those facts.

And since the number of *witnesses* or relators increases the probability of any fact whatever; TESTIMONY requires therefore such a number of witnesses as reason judges sufficient.

Finally, the more circumstantial the fact, the better it is known; and when the witnesses agree in the essential circumstances of the fact, but vary in the manner and in the terms only, a secret concert between *them seems* less probable. Testimony *requires circumstantial* evidences converging

towards each other, but varied however as to the form and expressions.

Further, if certain facts were attested by various ocular witnesses, which combated their most ancient, deeply-rooted, and beloved prejudices—the more I was convinced they had imbibed these prejudices, the greater would be my confidence in their evidence; because men are naturally apt to believe that which coincides with or favours their prejudices, and, on the contrary, believe with difficulty that which contradicts those prejudices.

If after all, these witnesses, to the most essential conditions required in evidence, united those transcendent qualities not usually met with in ordinary witnesses; if the most eminent virtues, an universal and active benevolence, were joined to sound sense and irreproachable manners; if these qualities were never disputed, even by their adversaries; if nature were as subservient to their command as to that of their master; if, finally, they persevered in their testimony with the most heroic constancy, and sealed it with their blood; their *evidence*

would then appear to me to have all the force of which human testimony is susceptible.

If therefore the witnesses chosen by the *Divine* MESSENGER united in themselves so many ordinary and extraordinary qualifications, I think it would be acting diametrically opposite to reason, if I rejected their *evidence*.

CHAP. III.

OBJECTIONS TO TESTIMONY, DRAWN FROM THE CONTRADICTION OF MIRACLES TO THE COURSE OF NATURE, OR FROM THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND THE TESTIMONY GIVEN TO MIRACULOUS FACTS.——ANSWERS.

HOWEVER positive and perfect any human evidence may appear, is it sufficient to establish the certainty, or even the probability, of facts contrary to the ordinary course of nature?

Now it is obvious, in the first place, that what I denominate a *miraculous* fact, is nevertheless an object of sense; and in the order of divine wisdom, it must be extremely clear and perceptible: such a fact, therefore, being submitted to the inquisition of my senses, may consequently be the subject of *testimony*.

The senses are surely competent to ascertain that a man is alive, or falls sick; that his disease increases, that he dies, that he is dead, and that his body emits a cadaverous stench: the senses are also sufficient to convince us, that the same man who was dead, is risen; that he walks, eats, drinks, &c.

These perceptible, palpable facts, may therefore be as well the object of testimony, as any other physical or historical fact. If the witnesses, therefore, of whom I speak, confine their testimony to these facts, I cannot reject their evidence, unless I reject the rules of testimony which I have laid down, and which are prescribed by the soundest logic. But if these witnesses did not confine their testimony simply to these facts; if they pretended to attest the secret cause which wrought this miracle; if they assured me, that it depended on a physical predetermination, their testimony on this point of cosmology would seem to me to lose much of its weight.

The reason of my scepticism with respect to this circumstance would be, becaus

this predetermination, which the witnesses allege, not being submitted to the senses, could not be a direct object of their testimony, as I think I have proved Chap. iii. Part xvi. of the Philos. *Palingenesis.*

These witnesses might however attest, that it was revealed to them by the divine legislator himself: but miracles would still be necessary to prove that they actually had that revelation, that is, facts out of the ordinary course of nature, and which ought to be submitted to the senses *.

There are therefore in a miracle two things, essentially different, and to be carefully distinguished:—The *fact* and the *manner* of the fact.

The first has a direct relation to the faculties of man; the second has relation only to the faculties of those intelligences who are acquainted with the secret œconomy of the world †.

* Vide Chap. vi. Part i.

† Vide Philos. Paling. Parts xii. xiii.

If, however, the witnesses attributed the extraordinary facts they attest to an act of *GOD*, that private opinion of the witnesses would not discredit their testimony in my mind; because it would be most natural for them to attribute to immediate divine intervention, facts, the near and efficient cause of which is not revealed to them. Undoubtedly, however, the first condition of testimony is, that the facts attested be not physically impossible, that is, not contrary to the laws of nature.

Experience discloses these laws, and by *reasoning* we deduce those theoretic and practical consequences, the systematical collection of which constitutes human science.

Now, the most constant experience of all times and all places militates against the physical possibility of the resurrection of a dead man.

Witnesses, however, whom I suppose highly worthy of credit, attest that a dead man did actually rise; they are unanimous

in their account, and that account is clear and circumstantial.

Thus am I situated between two testimonies directly opposite to each other; and if I considered them of equal weight, I should remain doubtful, and suspend my judgment.

Were the truth of atheism clearly demonstrated, I apprehend I should not suspend my judgment; nature would then have no legislator. She would be her own legislator, and her best interpreter would be the constant experience of all times and all places. But if it be proved that nature has a legislator, the proof admits, that the legislator can modify its laws.*

If these modifications be palpable facts, they may become the direct object of testimony.

If this testimony unite in the highest degree all those conditions which reason requires to confirm any testimony whatever; if, further, it unite even those which reason

* Vide Ch. iii. iv. and vi. of the first Part.

does not require in ordinary testimonies; it will appear, I think, morally certain, that the legislator has *spoken*.

This moral certainty will increase, if I can discover what were the views of the legislator, in *thus* modifying the laws of nature*.

* Vide Ch. vi. Part i.

CHAP. IV.

CONTINUATION OF OBJECTIONS TO TESTIMONIAL PROOF, WHEN APPLIED TO MIRACULOUS FACTS.—ANSWERS.—GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON PHYSICAL AND MORAL ORDER.

MY scepticism must not stop here. The facts, which I name *miraculous* are a violation of physical order: imposture is a violation of moral order, especially in witnesses who unite in the highest degree all the qualities essential to testimony.

Would it then be less probable, that such witnesses should attest false facts, than that a dead man should have risen?

On this subject I find it necessary to advert to what I have set forth concerning physical order, in Ch. v. and vi.* of the

* In those chapters the author has stated his hypothesis respecting miracles, and supported it by many arguments both in-

first Part: if I have proved that miracles might be the result of a physical predetermination, they will not be a violation of physical order; but they will be particular dispensations of that order, included in that great chain which binds the past to the present, the present to the future, and the future to eternity.

Physical order, then, is not precisely the same as moral order: the first relates to all possible modifications of bodies, the latter, to those of the soul.

The sum of the particular modifications of the soul is, what I call moral character.

The nature, the multiplicity, the variety of acts, which bring me to the knowledge of a moral character*, establish the opinion I form of that character.

genious and new, for which I refer the reader to the original. But, as this opinion may appear to some readers too refined and abstruse; and as Mr. Bonnet himself acknowledges, p. 219, that he does not mean to controvert the received opinion concerning miracles, and that this will answer every useful purpose as well as his own (p. 249), I have taken the liberty to omit those chapters.

* *Vide Ch. ii.* of this Part.

The number, therefore, and the variety of those acts, of which I am informed, will confirm my judgment as to this certainty.

If those acts bore the stamp of a most refined virtue; if they were directed towards one view; if that view were the supreme happiness of man; that moral character would appear eminently and illustriously virtuous.

It appears therefore less probable to me, that a witness eminently virtuous should attest as true an extraordinary fact, which he must know to be false, than that a body should undergo a modification contrary to the ordinary course of nature. Because I clearly discover a *first cause* and a view in this modification; because I discover no contradiction between this modification and that which I term the *essence* of a body; because, so far from discovering any sufficient reason why such a witness should deceive me, I, on the contrary, perceive many powerful motives, which might engage him to conceal the fact, did not the love of truth predominate in him.

If, moreover, many such witnesses concur in attesting the same miraculous fact; if they persevere with constancy in their narration; if by their perseverance they evidently expose themselves to the greatest calamities, and to death itself; I should conclude that the imposture of such witnesses would be such a violation of moral order, as I could not suppose, without controverting the dictates of common sense.

I presume I should further violate those dictates, if I imagined that these witnesses were deceived: for I have supposed that they attested a palpable fact, a fact of which the senses are as well able to judge as of any other fact; and the positive certainty of which was a matter of the highest importance to the witnesses.

One thing, however, I must admit, which is, that had I been a witness to this fact, it would have appeared to me indubitable, and yet it would not have appeared to me less contrary to the ordinary course of nature. Shall I deny, then, that men (endowed with the same faculties as those

which I enjoy), have not seen and felt, what I myself should have seen and felt, had I existed at the time and been in the place where the fact happened? Am I not therefore obliged to acknowledge that the proof which I deduced from physical order, cannot be put in opposition to that which I receive from moral order?

First. Because these proofs are of a very different nature, and because *moral* certainty is not *physical* certainty.

Secondly. Because here I have not even a physical certainty, which I can oppose to moral certainty; since I have admitted that physical order is subject to an intelligence, who may have modified it in a direct relation to a certain view, and that I distinctly perceive this view:* Therefore I cannot draw a general conclusion from experience, or from physical order, against testimony: this conclusion would extend beyond the premises.

* Vide Part i. Ch. vi.

I may form this particular conclusion, That, according to the ordinary course of nature, the dead do not rise; but I cannot logically affirm, that there is not a secret dispensation of the physical order, of which the resurrection of the dead might be the result: and to affirm in general the *impossibility* of the resurrection of the dead, would be still more repugnant to sound logic.

Were it even demonstrated further, that miracles can only be the result of an *immediate* act of omnipotence, that act would not imply a violation of physical order; because the legislator of nature does not violate his laws, whenever he suspends or modifies those laws. He does not act by a new will. Supreme intelligence beheld at once the whole series of things, and miracles entered from eternity into that series, as a condition of the greatest good*.

* I entreat that what I advanced concerning miracles, Part i. Chap. vi. Note 13, may be read over again. I do not wish that any one should imagine, that I consider my hypothesis as true.

This idea is clearly set forth by the author of the Essay on Psychology †; although his style, often too concise, does not bring it within the comprehension of all readers: "Whenever," he says, "the course of nature appears suddenly altered, or interrupted, that interruption is termed a miracle, and is supposed to be an effect of an immediate act of God. Such a judgment may be proved false, and the miracle may be the result of second causes or of a pre-established arrangement. The essential good; which was to result from it, might require this arrangement or exception to the ordinary laws, but, if there are miracles which imply an immediate act of God, this act became part of the plan, as a necessary means for happiness: in both cases the effect is the same with respect to faith."

† Essay on Psychology, Part iii. Chap. iii.

CHAP. V.

WHETHER IT BE PROBABLE THAT THE WITNESSES OF THE GOSPEL WERE EITHER DECEIVERS OR DECEIVED.

I HAVE supposed that the witnesses could neither deceive nor be deceived. The first supposition was built on their integrity; the second, on the clearness of the facts.

The probability of the first supposition would, in my opinion, considerably increase if the facts attested were admitted to be of such a nature that no man of sound sense could have been deceived respecting them.

I can easily conceive, that a false doctrine may gain credit: it is the understanding which is to judge of a doctrine, and the understanding is not always endued with

sufficient powers to enable it to detect falshoods of a particular kind.

But if the inquiry concern things which fall under our senses, things of public notoriety, things which happened at a time and in places where the witnesses were exposed to continual contradictions; if, finally, these things attack national, political, and religious prejudices; how can we suppose it possible that impostors, unless totally deprived of their senses, could flatter themselves that credit would be given to such things?

They would scarcely, I think, pretend to persuade their countrymen and contemporaries, that a man, whose death was public and notorious, was risen again; that darkness covered the land; that the earth shook at the decease of this man, &c.; and, if we suppose these impostors illiterate men, and of the lowest class, it is still less reasonable to imagine that they would pretend to speak foreign languages, and absurdly upbraid an entire and numerous society with making an ill use of the same extraordinary gift, if

that society had not received it. I may be mistaken; but it seems to me, that such pretensions, if false, could never have been admitted; and this would seem to me still more improbable, if those who publicly professed the belief of these facts, and propagated them, exposed themselves voluntarily to every thing of which men have the most natural abhorrence, especially, if I discovered in their narrations no marks of fanaticism.

The improbability, in fine, of this supposition, would seem to increase still more, if the public testimony given of such facts had effected in the world a revolution much more astonishing than those ever caused by the most famous conquerors.

It follows, I think, in a legitimate manner, from the palpability of the facts, that the witnesses of whom I have spoken could not be imposed upon themselves. Can I possibly doubt whether the senses are competent, or not, to ascertain that a paralytic walks, that a blind man sees, that a dead man is raised? &c.

Let us suppose, particularly, that the point in question is the resurrection of a man, with whom the witnesses had lived in the most familiar manner for the space of several years. If that man had been condemned to death by a supreme tribunal; if he had publicly died a most painful death; if the tortures he underwent had left scars on his body; if, after his resurrection, this man had appeared several times to those same witnesses; if they had conversed and eaten several times with him; if they had recollected or examined his scars; if, finally, they had formed the strongest doubts of his resurrection, and if their entire conviction was owing to the repeated and concurring testimonies of their eyes, their ears, and their touch; if, I say, all these facts are supposed true, I should not be able to conceive how these witnesses could possibly have been deceived. But further, if these attested miracles, as I have already said *, formed an uninterrupted chain, all the links of which were closely riveted to-

* Vide Part i. Chap. vi.

gether; if these miracles composed, as it were, a well-continued discourse, the parts of which were dependent on and supported each other; if the gift of speaking divers tongues argued necessarily the resurrection of a certain man, and his ascension into heaven; if the miracles which this man had pretended to perform before his death, and which were attested to me by ocular witnesses, were indissolubly connected with those which have already been noticed; if these miracles were numerous and various; if they had been wrought for the space of many years; if, I say (and as I suppose), all this were true, it would be impossible for me to conceive that the witnesses in question should have been deceived, respecting so many palpable, plain, and different facts.

It appears to me, at least, that had it been possible for them to have been deceived concerning any of these extraordinary facts, it would have been physically impossible for them to have been deceived in all.

But, above all, how can I conceive that these witnesses should have been deceived, as to the many and various miracles which they themselves wrought ?

CHAP. VI.

OTHER OBJECTIONS TO TESTIMONY, DERIVED FROM THE DOCTRINE OF OPINION, AND THE ILLUSIONS OF THE SENSES.—ANSWERS.

I SHALL not on this occasion engage in any subtle disquisitions concerning the reality of the objects of our sensations, the illusion of the senses, or the existence of bodies; these metaphysical subtleties do not essentially belong to the examination of my subject; I have discussed them at large in several of my other writings, and have said on that subject whatever sound philosophy suggested to me.

I know perfectly well, that the objects of our sensations cannot be in themselves, what they appear to us to be; I see objects which I denominate *material;* from the essential properties of these objects, I de-

duce the general notion of matter. "I will not "affirm* (to repeat what I said in another "place), that the attributes by which I am "acquainted with matter, are precisely "what they appear to be: it is my soul "which perceives them; they there- "fore bear a relation to the manner in "which my soul perceives them; they may "then, not be exactly that which they ap- "pear to be. But, most assuredly, that "which they appear to be, results necessa- "rily from what they are in themselves, "and from what I am in relation to them. "As, therefore, I can affirm, respecting a "circle, the equality of its radii: so I can "affirm respecting matter, that it is extend- "ed and solid; or, to speak more accurate- "ly, that there is something *out of me*, "which gives me the idea of solid extent. "The attributes of matter, with which I "am acquainted, are therefore effects; I "observe these effects, although I am igno- "rant of the causes. There may be other

* Preface to the Analytical Essay.

"effects, of the existence of which I have "not the least suspicion: Does a blind man "suspect the use of the prism? But I am at "least perfectly convinced that the effects, "which are unknown to me, are not con-"tradictory to those which *I know*."

I have explained, in Chap. ii. of Part xiii. of the Phil. Pal. that material objects, in the eye of what I esteem true philosophy*, are simply mere phenomena, simple appearances, depending partly on our manner of seeing and conceiving;—these phenomena, however, are no less real, permanent and invariable—they are no less the result of the immutable laws of our being. These phenomena, therefore, still remain a solid basis for our mode of reasoning.

Because, therefore, the objects of our sensations are not in themselves what they appear to be, it does not follow, that we cannot reason on those objects as if they were so. It is sufficient for us, that these appearances never change. I might say

* The Philosophy of Leibnitz.

still more:—if the* doctrine of an ideal world were strictly demonstrated, it would in no respect change the order of our *sensible* ideas, nor the judgment we form of those ideas; the universe, though purely *ideal*, would not exist less to every individual soul; neither would it represent or offer the less to our soul, the same things, the same combinations, and the same succession of things, which we contemplate at present.

It is well known, that the pious and learned prelate†, who so openly declared himself the advocate of this singular system, affirmed, that it was of all systems the most favourable to that religion to which he dedicated his time and fortune.

If I pretended, therefore, that our state of ignorance concerning the particular nature of the objects of our sensations could weaken the testimony afforded to miraculous facts,

* A philosophical opinion which admits of no bodies in nature, and reduces every thing to ideas; a clear account of this singular doctrine may be seen, in Chap. xxxiii. of the Essay on Psychology.

† Berkley, Bishop of Cloyne.

facts, I should necessarily bring myself to doubt of all physical truths, of those of natural history, and of historical facts. Would so universal a Pyrrhonism be conformable to reason? I should have said, even to common sense?

I shall say nothing as to the illusion of the senses: because I have supposed the miraculous facts were palpable, numerous, and diversified; such, in fine, as not to admit of a doubt concerning their certainty. It would, besides, be very unreasonable to argue concerning the illusion of the senses, whilst we treat of facts, which may have been examined, and which I *suppose* to have been examined, by several senses.

CHAP. VII.

EXPERIENCE SET IN OPPOSITION TO ITSELF.—NEW OBJECTIONS TO TESTIMONIAL PROOF.—ANSWER.

AFTER all, a question presents itself, Have I not granted too much in favour of testimony? Is not my reasoning erroneous? Have I sufficiently doubted? I am convinced of the veracity of men, merely by the knowledge I have acquired of men: that knowledge is supported by experience; yet it is experience itself which contradicts the physical possibility of miracles.—Thus I have experience in opposition to experience.—How then am I to decide between two *experiences* so greatly in opposition to each other?

In this case I discover distinctions, which arise from the nature of the subject, and which I shall attempt to develope. As I

could not exist in all times and in all places, my personal experience becomes necessarily very confined, and that of my fellow-creatures falls under the same predicament; testimony, therefore, is the only road by which I can arrive at the knowledge of every experience which I have not made myself.

When I advance that the experience of all times and of all places evinces that the dead do not rise, I only say, that the *testimony* of all times and all places attests that the dead do not rise. If, therefore, weighty testimonies appear, attesting that dead men did rise, there will be an opposition between these two testimonies.

I say, however, that these testimonies will not, properly speaking, be contradictory; because the testimonies which bear witness that the dead do not rise, do not attest that it is *impossible* for the dead to rise. The testimonies, therefore, which appear opposed to each other, do in reality no more than dissent from each other. Now, if the testimonies which attest that the dead did rise, have all the requisite qualities to com-

mand my assent, I cannot reasonably refuse it; because,

First, The contrary testimonies cannot prove the *impossibility* of this resurrection.

Secondly. Because I have no proof that physical order may not contain some secret dispensations, of which this resurrection might be the result.

Thirdly. Because, at the same time that the witnesses attest this resurrection, I evidently discover the moral intention of the miracle.

There is not, therefore, properly speaking, any contradiction between the *experiences*, but there is *diversity* between the testimonies.

It is true, that experience makes known to me *physical order*; it is also by experience that I come to the knowledge of *moral order*. But these two modes of experience are not precisely of the same kind, neither can they be placed in competition with each other.

From experience of the first kind I may legitimately deduce, that, according to the ordinary course of nature, the dead do not rise; but I cannot with propriety conclude, that it is physically impossible for the dead to rise.

I may deduce from experience of the second kind, that men endued with the same faculties as myself, may have seen and felt things, which I should have seen and felt, had I existed in the same time and in the same place.

And if I have competent moral proofs of the validity of their testimony, I may also deduce from this kind of experience, that those men have seen and felt those things.

The Indian, when he asserts that it is physically impossible for water to become a solid body, is no logician; his conclusion reaches beyond the premises from which it is drawn. When he has said that he has never seen, and that no one has ever seen, water become, in his country, a solid body; so far he is justified in his assertions: but he should proceed no further. Indeed,

having never seen ice, and also being very certain that no one of his countrymen had ever seen any, he has a right to be very incredulous concerning the testimonies which are offered to him, concerning such a fact.

If, in physics, I had reasoned only from known facts, I must necessarily have rejected, without examination, the wonders of electricity, the prodigy of the polype, and a multiplicity of facts of the same kind; for, what analogy could I discover between these prodigies and those facts which the ordinary course of nature presents to my consideration! And yet I believed these prodigies; because, in the first place, the evidence for them appeared competent: Secondly, because, in sound logic, my ignorance of the secrets of nature was not a sufficient authority to oppose to weighty testimonies. But, as a greater number of moral proofs are requisite to make a miraculous fact appear probable, than to render probable a physical prodigy, I think also that I discover, in the testimonies adduced in favour of the miraculous facts in question, characters of

truth, proportioned to the nature of the facts.

I have pointed out what appeared to me to constitute the difference between a miracle and a prodigy*. I have not termed miracles *supernatural* facts. I had seen sufficiently that they might be the result of a pre-established arrangement; I therefore simply called them *extraordinary* events, as opposed to those events which are conformable to the ordinary course of nature. If the testimonies were in actual contradiction to each other, it would follow, that the witnesses, who attest the resurrection of a dead man, must attest, at the same time, that this resurrection was produced according to the ordinary course of nature. Now I well know, that, so far from attesting this, they have attributed the miracle to the intervention of omnipotence.

I cannot therefore logically argue, from the uniformity of the course of nature, against the testimony which affirms that this uniformity is not constant; for, I must

* Vide Part i. Chap. vi.

once more repeat it, the experience which attests the uniformity of the course of nature, does not in the least prove, that its course may not be altered or modified.*

* Vide the French translation of Campbell on miracles, and especially the notes of the translator.

CHAP. VIII.

REFLECTIONS ON MORAL CERTAINTY.

IT is plain, therefore, that moral ought not to be confounded with physical certainty. This last may be reduced to an exact calculation, whenever all the cases possible are known, as at games of hazard, &c.; or to approximations, when all the possible cases are not known, or the experiences are not sufficiently multiplied, as in those things which concern the duration or accidents of human life, &c.

But those things which we call *moral*, cannot be reduced to calculation; in this case, the unknown so far exceed in number the known circumstances, that there is a want of data to proceed upon.

In the composition of man, the moral and physical are mixed together, and hence arises a greater complication. Of all terrestrial beings, man is the most complicated. How then can the algebraic expression of a moral character be given? Are we sufficiently acquainted with the soul? with the body? with their mysterious union? Can we, with any precision, estimate the various effects of so many circumstances acting continually on that compound being? Can we ——but let me rather request the reader to re-consider what I have said in Chap. v. and vi. of Part xiii. of the Phil. Pal. concerning the imperfection of morals.

Shall I however conclude, from what has been said, that there is no moral certainty? Because the secret of man's composition is unknown to me, shall I conclude, that I am wholly unacquainted with man? Because I cannot discover the cause why the vibration of certain fibres in the brain is accompanied with certain ideas, shall I deny the existence of those ideas? It would be denying the existence of my own ideas. Because I do not see those infinitely delicate

fibres, the actions of which seem to influence the understanding and will, shall I doubt whether there is an understanding and *will?* This would be doubting whether I myself have an understanding and will, &c. &c.

I am well acquainted with certain general facts, the result of the constitution of man, and I clearly perceive that moral certainty is built on these results. I know well enough what, and how far, my senses *can* or *cannot* effect concerning matters of fact, to be well assured that certain facts may have been seen and felt. I am sufficiently conversant with the faculties and affections of man, to be morally certain, that, in such or such given circumstances, witnesses may have attested the truth. I am even obliged to confess, that if I refused adhering to these principles, I should renounce the most common maxims of reason, and that I should controvert the civil order of all ages and all nations.

If then I seek after truth with an honest heart, I shall not subtilize a question plain enough in itself, and of the highest impor-

tance." I shall endeavour to reduce it to its true limits. I shall grant that testimony may prove miracles; but I shall carefully examine, whether the testimony unites in itself such conditions as are requisite to establish such facts, or at least to render them very probable.

CHAP. IX.

PARTICULAR CONSIDERATIONS ON MIRACLES, AND ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH OUGHT TO ACCOMPANY AND TO CHARACTERIZE THEM.

IT seems to me that there is one essential condition requisite in the character of miracles, viz. that they should always be accompanied with circumstances adequate to the establishment of their purpose.

These circumstances may be very foreign to the secret and efficient cause of the miracle; particular words, spoken by a man in an audible voice, are not the efficient cause of the resurrection of a dead man. But, if nature instantaniously obey the voice of that man, who can doubt that the LORD of nature has spoken? From the principles, therefore, which I have endeavoured to establish, it follows, that they would have happened, had there been neither a divine *messenger*, nor witnesses, who seemed to

command nature. The miracles for which I contend, according to my principles, were linked to that universal chain, which predetermines the time and the manner of the appearances of things *.

* But, because, consistently with my hypothesis, miracles sprang from a particular system of the laws of nature, and this constituted a part of the great chain which connects all events, the following inference would not be well-grounded—that, according to my hypothesis (to employ the words of a certain critic), miracles do not differ from the *most ordinary events*, and that, consequently, they can in no manner be produced as a proof of an extraordinary mission. Undoubtedly, to superior intelligences, intimately acquainted with the secret of the composition of the world, and with the whole extent and force of those laws which govern natural beings, and all the combinations whereof these laws are susceptible; to such intelligences, miracles undoubtedly would not essentially differ from the *most ordinary events*: if GOD, therefore, meant to speak to such intelligences, if he chose to reveal to them somewhat not included within the actual sphere of their faculties, it is evident that this language of the laws of nature (on which I very particularly enlarged in Chap. iv, v. vi. Part xvii. Phil. Palin.) could not answer his purpose. Faculties of a different order, require revelations of a different order. But who does not distinctly see the wide difference between man and those intelligences? Is it not plain, that the resurrection of a man effected in a moment, by the divine messenger pronouncing a few words, must be to men a speaking proof of the extraordinary mission of CHRIST? The intelligent and attentive reader, who has well digested, and who is thoroughly conversant in my principles, will not be at a loss to confute the objections which may arise from them, and those principles are laid down only for readers of that kind. Neither will it appear to them, as to the critic whom I am endeavouring to confute, that the proofs of the miracles are supported with difficulty by philosophical reasonings.

But, had there been neither a divine messenger, nor witnesses to interpret to mankind this extraordinary dispensation, and to develope the design of it, it would have remained unfruitful, and would have been merely an object of curiosity and idle speculation*.

The miracles might then have appeared consistent with the ordinary course of nature, or to depend on some uncommon circumstances. They would have been nothing but mere prodigies, on which the learned would have built systems, and which the ignorant part of mankind would have attributed to some invisible power.

Several of these miracles too could not have taken place, because the performance of them was connected with outward circumstances, which were to be pre-

* Christ, therefore, would not have acted conformably to the design of the miracles, had he revealed to the spectators how he wrought these miracles, or the secret of their execution. For the persuasion and instruction of the spectators, it sufficed, that the facts in question were not included in the ordinary course of events, and that nature appeared to obey instantaneously the voice of Christ.

pared by the *Messiah* or his ministers. But in the plan of divine wisdom all was harmony and connexion; the miracles bore a specific relation to a certain point of time and space; their appearance was to depend on that of those persons who were to signify to nature the orders of the legislator, and to men the intentions of his goodness. This, therefore, would be the proper place to enquire into that parallelism of nature and grace, so well fitted to proclaim to reflecting beings that supreme intelligence which has pre-ordained every thing by one single act*.—If the messenger and his mi-

* My principles on this pre-ordination would be very ill understood, were it argued, that they destroy human liberty. Free actions have been foreseen, because they essentially supposed motives, and because the motives have been foreseen by him *who sayeth the reins and the heart.*

To foresee a free act, is not the same as to effect it; to permit it, is not the same as to produce it.

Prescience is always relative to the nature of the act, and to that of the agent. To foresee, therefore, is, to know with certainty the influence of causes, and the particular nature of the mixed being on whom these causes act, or on account of which this being determines itself. Does not the Creator of man *know how man is fashioned?* Is the secret of the composition of the world hidden to him who has made the *world?* Does not the

misters prayed for extraordinary cures, or other miraculous events, their prayers also constituted a part of that great chain; they

workman know his work? And, because the author of man knows how man is made, does it follow, that man should have neither will nor liberty? Because God knows the intimate nature of these free agents, is it a consequence, that this knowledge destroys the liberty of these beings? If knowledge supposes always an object, that knowledge will be certain and infallible, wherever the object is perfectly known; and if this object has natural relations to other objects, these last to others, &c. and if certain effects are to result from these various relations, these effects will be precisely foreknown, if these various relations are exactly known. The effects were intended to be subordinate to causes; these last to each other; otherwise there would have been neither order nor harmony.

Fore-knowledge was a natural consequence of this subordination.

The adorable intelligence to whom every thing in the universe is laid open, who discovers the effects in their causes, these causes in himself; who has beheld, from all eternity, the minutest work of the ant, as well as the prodigies of the cherubim; this intelligence, properly speaking, does not *foresee* free actions; it *sees* them. For futurity is to that intelligence as the present moment, and all ages are as an indivisible instant.

I shall not engage myself any further on a subject so elevated, and so much controverted. I wish that what I have advanced concerning liberty, in Art. xii. and xiii. of the abridged Analysis, may be read over with attention. And I flatter myself, that it will appear plainly that my principles on that matter do not in the least incline to fatality.

had been foreseen, from all eternity, by HIM who holds the chain in his hand, and he had co-ordained the causes of such or such a miracle with such or such prayers.

CHAP. X.

EXTRAORDINARY DOUBT:—EXAMINATION OF IT.

THERE still remains a doubt unsatisfied, concerning testimony, which requires some consideration.

I have admitted as very probable, at least that the witnesses, who attested these miraculous facts, were neither deceivers nor deceived.—But, possibly, they were impostors of a singular nature, and of a very elevated kind.

I suppose a set of men, ardently zealous for the welfare of mankind, who, being thoroughly convinced of the beauty and usefulness of a doctrine which they passionately wished to promulge, saw clearly the absolute necessity of miracles to arrive at *their end.*

I suppose that these men invented false miracles, and thus exhibited themselves as messengers from the Most High.

Finally, I suppose that thus inspired, and supported by this new kind of heroism, they voluntarily devoted themselves to tortures and to death, in support of an imposture so conducive to the happiness of mankind.

I have already accumulated a number of very extraordinary suppositions. And now I must ask, whether such a species of heroism is consonant to the analogy of moral order? Let me, above all things, avoid every supposition repugnant to common sense.

Can then simple illiterate men invent such a doctrine? Can they form such a plan? Will they carry it into execution? Will they bring it to a conclusion?

Men who profess in heart and soul to believe a future life, and a God, the avenger of imposture, will *they* hope to arrive at felicity by *the means* of imposture?

Will men, who, far from being assured that God will approve their imposture, have, on the contrary, the strongest reasons to believe that he will utterly condemn it ; will those men expose themselves to the greatest calamities, the greatest perils, to death itself, to defend and propagate that imposture ?

Men who aim at the glorious title of benefactors to mankind, will *they* expose their fellow-creatures to the most cruel trials, without being at all certain of that compensation which they promise them ?

Men who associate together to execute so strange a plan, so complicated, so dangerous—can *they* rely on each other ? Can they flatter themselves that they will never be betrayed ? And will they never be betrayed ? Men who undertake, not only to convince their contemporaries of the truth and usefulness of a certain doctrine, but who undertake to convince them also of the reality of facts incredible in their nature, public, numerous, various, circumstantial, recent facts ; can *they* flatter themselves with

the hope of obtaining the smallest credit, if all these facts be pure invention? Can they flatter themselves with the hope of passing for ever undetected? And will they never be detected? Can men——But I sink under the weight of objections, and I am obliged to abandon suppositions so contradictory to common sense.—It is scarcely possible to conceive, that so extraordinary a heroism could have entered into a single mind, much less into several, and that it could produce the same effects, the same force, constancy, and union in all. And what appears to me so improbable, with respect to such a kind of heroism, would appear to me no less so in regard to the love of glory and renown.

If, on the most solid grounds, I am convinced that there is a moral order* ; if the judgments I form of mankind are the necessary result of that moral order ; I cannot admit suppositions which have no analogy with that moral order, and which even stand in direct opposition to it.

* Vide this Book, Chap. i.

CHAP. XI.

OTHER DOUBTS.—FONDNESS FOR THE MARVELLOUS.—FALSE MIRACLES.—MARTYRS OF ERROR OR OPINION.—REFLECTIONS.

IN the process of this investigation, doubts seem spontaneously to arise, and to crowd upon each other. The subject in which I am engaged is as complicated as it is important.

It may be viewed in various lights; and I cannot undertake to consider them all; I have therefore selected those only which are of most immediate consequence.

The religious annals of almost every nation are full of apparitions, miracles, prodigies, &c. There is hardly a religious opinion, but what can exhibit miracles, and even martyrs, to support it. The human mind delights in what is marvellous; it has

an innate fondness for what is new and extraordinary. It is captivated with every prodigy. It lends a willing ear to them, and frequently believes them without examination. The mind does not even seem framed for doubting; it is rather addicted to believing; philosophical doubts imply efforts, which, in general, are painful and laborious.

These natural dispositions of the human mind are well calculated to increase philosophical diffidence, respecting every thing that has the appearance of miracles; and must tend to render the philosopher very cautious in admitting the proofs adduced in support of them.

But shall the dreams of the alchymist induce the philosopher to reject the truths of chymistry? Because multitudes of physical and historical works are full of mistaken observations and doubtful facts, shall the attentive philosopher reject all books of physics and history? Or, will he conclude, indiscriminately, against observation and fact? If many religious opinions have rested their

support on miracles, that alone would convince me, that men, in all places and in all ages, have considered miracles as the most expressive language of divinity, and the characteristic seal by which its messengers* are to be known.

* Hence Christ frequently appeals to this proof, as the most convincing.—*The works that I do in my father's name, they bear witness of me.—If I had not done among them works that never man did.—Though ye believe not me, believe the works.—If the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented.*

Miracles were, in fact, one of the chief characteristics by which the Jews thought the Messiah would be made known.—*When the Messiah cometh, will he do greater miracles than this man?*

Should any one pretend, that Christ himself meant to weaken this strong proof, when he said, in express words, *There shall arise false christs:* should he pretend that Christ meant to intimate, by these words, the little credit that ought to be given to miracles; he would manifestly go contrary to all the rules of sound criticism: for, if it can be proved by history, that the nation alluded to in this passage was then much addicted to magic and enchantments; if it can be proved by the history of that nation, that, a short time after the coming of Christ, there arose false prophets, who had recourse to magical arts to seduce the people; if that seduction was so much the easier, because the whole nation then professed to expect and wait for the coming of Christ the Messiah; it would then appear most evident, that Christ, by these words, meant only to forewarn his disciples against the impostures of those false Christs, who would have imposed on the credulity of the people, by persuading them that

I afterwards enter into a more minute detail; I compare facts with facts, miracles with miracles; I place testimony in opposition to testimony; and I am struck with amazement, when I discover the enormous difference between the miracles attested to me by the witnesses of whom I have spoken, and the facts alleged in support of certain religious opinions.

The first appear to me so superior, both as to their nature, their number, variety, connexion, duration, publicity, usefulness†; and, above all, in the importance of the general design, the greatness of its consequences, the strength of the evidence‡; that I

they were *that* Christ, whose appearance the ancient oracles foretold.

Would a discreet physician incur the imputation of discrediting medicine, because he warned the unwary public against the seductions of empirics? But, true physicians are not to be seduced by empirics: and therefore Christ adds, *If it were possible, they would deceive the very elect.*

† There is no vain ostentation of power, no parade, in these miracles; most of them are works of mercy and acts of benevolence.

‡ I earnestly request the reader, who can entertain a doubt on this head, to weigh in the scale of reason, one by one, the differ-

cannot reasonably refuse to admit them as very probable, at least; whilst, on the other hand, I cannot reasonably admit, but must reject the others, as inventions equally ridiculous in themselves and repugnant to the wisdom and majesty of the Lord of nature.

Shall I then hesitate to decide between the prestiges and tricks of an Alexander

ent characteristics which I have pointed out; and which (in my opinion) all meet in the miracles of the gospel. I further request of him, to apply, one after the other, all these characteristics to those facts, either ancient or modern, which are produced as miraculous, and seriously to question himself, in the silent moment of retirement, whether these facts can bear a comparison. He will observe the enumeration of these characteristics, which I might have carried much further, and have developed much more at large, if the nature of this work had allowed me. 1st, the nature—2d, the number—3d, the diversity—4th, the connexion—5th, the duration—6th, the publicity—7th, the direct or particular usefulness—8th, the importance of the general design—9th, the greatness of its consequences—10th, the force of the evidence. It were easy to find, in ancient and modern history, facts, even juridically attested, as miraculous, which however were mere inventions, tricks of art, or effects of nature, but striking in their various circumstances, either physical or moral. Our times have exhibited, and still exhibit, many examples. The truly logical and critical reader will apply, therefore, to these facts, the different characteristics which the miracles of the gospel exhibit. He will not be satisfied with general comparisons; he will enter into the minutest and deepest discussion: he will not stop at the greatest and most striking proofs; he will analyze even the smallest, and carry the analysis to its very last elements.

Pontanus*, or an Apollonius Thyanæus†, and those attested by the witnesses in question? Shall I balance between the authority of a Philostrates‡ and that of the apostles?

It is to be presumed, that, after so nice and close an examination, the reader will class in the same category the miracles of the gospel, and all the facts held up as miraculous by different sects and parties?

I never said, because I never thought it, that, provided a fact was attested as miraculous, we are under an obligation of believing it as miraculous; but I have expatiated on the various characteristics which miracles must have, and on the testimonies which support them, so that they may obtain the suffrage of reason.

I request only one favour of the reader, which is, to bestow upon me that attention which the nature of my work requires; not to form a judgment of the cause I am treating by a few passages, but by the whole entire chain of my reasoning; I mean, by the collection of all the proofs which I bring together or point out.

* A famous impostor.

† Another famous impostor in the reign of Nero. Hierocles, a Pagan philosopher, who lived in the beginning of the fourth century, composed a book, intitled, Philalethes, in which he compared the pretended miracles of Apollonius with those of Christ.

‡ Author of the Romance of Apollonius, who composed it to pay his court to Caracalla, a superstitious prince, and much addicted to magic.

Shall I weigh in the same scales fable and history*?

If in the most enlightened age, and in the capital of a great kingdom, it has been pretended that miracles were wrought by *convulsions*†; if a person in a public employment has handed them down in a voluminous work; if he has endeavoured to support them by various testimonies; if a numerous society has detailed these facts, as proofs in favour of their opinion concerning a passage in a theological treatise: the whole of this will appear to me a burlesque invention, and I shall contemplate with regret the melancholy wanderings of human reason‡.

* Every one will see that the nature of this essay will not allow me to enter into historical and critical details, which would be inconsistent with a simple sketch. Those details may be found in almost every book that has been published in favour of the cause in which I am engaged. I shall only refer the reader, at present, to the learned notes of the respectable M. Seigneux de Correvon, on the work of the celebrated Addison.

† Alluding to the pretended miracles of the Abbé Paris.

‡ Undoubtedly, the judicious reader will not require that I should enlarge any further on an event so disgraceful to the age we live in. I should even be almost tempted to censure some celebrated writers for their time so ill employed in the discussion of

. And because error has had its martyrs, as well as truth, I cannot persuade myself to consider martyrs as proofs, in fact, of the truth of any particular opinion: but if vir-

such facts, were I not convinced of their laudable motives. That truth which they defended, had no cause to fear the weak shafts which they attempted to turn aside.

Will the great Author of nature suspend its laws to decide so ridiculous a question, as whether some words are or are not in a certain book, or to fix the sense of some particular words of a writer of the last century? Neither can it be objected, that in such a case the great Ruler of nature might suspend its laws to confirm the religion or doctrine advanced by a particular doctor, or the society of which he is a member. For, were it evident in the eyes of reason, that the words of this doctor cannot apparently influence the happiness of mankind, is it to be presumed that divine wisdom would interfere to authorize by miracles a particular opinion? After all, there would still remain an accurate examination to be made of the miracles alleged as a proof of that doctrine, and an inquiry also into that doctrine itself. See on this subject, note ‡ page 97. This reasoning may be applied to all the events of the same nature as that which has given rise to this note. It would therefore be a very frivolous objection to the miracles of the gospel, to allege that certain facts have been hastily admitted as miraculous by individuals, or even by whole societies, and published as such; for, in attempting to give any weight to this objection, it would be requisite to prove, in a precise and satisfactory manner, that the credibility on each side is equal or nearly the same. The logician and critic would be necessitated to draw the parallel mentioned in note ‡. For in sound logic it will never follow, that the miracles of the gospel are not true, because a number of persons of every rank and sex have received and published false miracles as true.

tuous men, men of sound sense, suffer martyrdom in support of an opinion, I may lawfully conclude, that they were at least fully convinced of the truth of that opinion. It will be proper therefore to enquire into the foundations of their opinion; and, if I find that the facts were so palpable, so numerous, so diversified, so united together, and so connected with the most important end, that it was morally impossible for these men to have been imposed upon in these facts; I shall then consider their martyrdom as the *final seal* of their testimony.

CHAP. XII.

CONCESSIONS OF THE ADVERSARIES OF CHRISTIANITY.

IF after having heard these witnesses, who sealed with their blood the testimony they had given to these miraculous facts, I learn that their most openly declared enemies, their own countrymen and contemporaries, have attributed to magic the greater number of these facts, this accusation of magic will appear to me an indirect avowal of the reality of these facts. This avowal will, in my opinion, acquire a still greater weight, if the enemies of these witnesses are at the same time their natural and legitimate superiors; and if, being able to employ all the means which power and authority can administer to expose that which they presume to be an imposture, they ne-

ver have succeeded. If, moreover, in the progress of my inquiries, it appear further, that these very witnesses, who could not be confuted by their own magistrates, have constantly persevered in charging these magistrates with the greatest of crimes, and that they even dared to accuse them to their face; in this case, I think the inference will be infinitely more striking. If afterwards it appear, that other enemies of these witnesses have also attributed to magical arts the miraculous facts they attested; if I am convinced that these enemies were as enlightened as the age in which they lived admitted; that they were equally knowing, artful, vigilant, and inveterate; if I know that most of them existed in times not very distant from those of the witnesses; if, finally, I know that one of those enemies, the most subtle, the most artful, the most obstinate of them all, and seated too on one of the most illustrious thrones in the world, has admitted several of these miraculous facts; is it possible for me, consistent with the rules of sound criticism, not to consider these avowals as strong presumptions in fa-

vour of the reality of the facts in question?*

* I again repeat it, the nature of my plan does not admit historical and critical details; the reader will meet with the most material of these concessions of Celsus, Porphyry, Julian, and the other adversaries of the evangelical witnesses, in the excellent treatises of Grotius, Ditton, Vernet, Bergur, Bullet, &c. Many of the best apologists for these witnesses might however, perhaps, be charged (and not without reason) with having considered rather the number of their arguments than their weight. See also Campbell on Miracles.

BOOK III.

CHAP. I.

CHARACTER OF THE WRITTEN EVIDENCE, AND OF THE WITNESSES.

THE witnesses to these miraculous facts have undoubtedly handed down to posterity, in some book, the testimony which they so publicly, so invariably, and so unanimously gave of these facts. Accordingly, a book is exhibited as the genuine narration of the witnesses.

I examine this book with all the attention of which I am capable; and I freely own, that the more I examine it, the more I am struck with the characteristics of truth, the originality, and sublimity, which I discover.

This book appears to me unexampled, and absolutely inimitable. The sublimity of thought, the majesty and simplicity of expression; the beauty, the purity, I could almost say the *homogeneity* of the doctrine; the importance, the universality, and the expressive brevity and paucity of the precepts; their admirable appropriation to the nature and wants of man; the ardent charity which so generously enforces the observation of them; the affecting piety, force, and gravity of the composition; the profound and truly philosophical sense which I discover in it; these are the characters which fix my attention to the book I examine, and which I do not meet with, in the same degree, in any production of the human mind. I am equally affected with the candour, the ingenuousness, the modesty, I should have said, the humility, of the writers, and that unexampled and constant forgetfulness of themselves, which never admits their own reflections, or the smallest eulogium in reciting the actions of their master.

When I remark the plain, simple, and dispassionate account given by these wri-

ters of the greatest events, never attempting to astonish their readers, but endeavouring always to enlighten and convince them, I am irresistibly led to believe, that their only view was that of attesting to mankind a truth which they conceived of the highest importance to human happiness.

Regardless of themselves, they seem full only of that great truth which they promulgated: I am not surprised, therefore, to find truth the only object which they have studied in their composition. This they exhibit unadorned, unembellished; their language therefore is simple—*The leper stretched forth his hand, and it became whole—The sick man took up his bed and walked.*

The distinguishing characteristics of the true sublime appear in these writings; for when God is the object, it is sublime to say, *He spake, and it was done;* but it is easily discerned that the sublime occurs there only because the thing was of an extraordinary nature, and because the writer delivered it as he saw it, that is, as it was. These writers appear to me not only most completely

ingenuous, for they do not even dissemble their own weakness; but I am still more astonished, when they do not even dissemble certain circumstances of the life and sufferings of their master, which have no tendency to enchance his glory in the eyes of the world. Had they been silent as to these circumstances, their adversaries assuredly could never have discovered them, nor consequently have taken any advantage from them. They have, however, not failed to relate them, and with all their minutest circumstances. It is impossible, therefore, not to feel that the purport of their writing was to bear testimony to the truth.

Is it possible, I say to myself, that these fishermen, who are supposed to perform actions not less astonishing than those of their master; who say to the lame man *Rise up and walk! and he walked*; is it possible that these fishermen should be so destitute of vanity, that they should disdain the applauses of the people who were spectators of these prodigies?

My surprise and admiration, therefore, are equal, when I read these words,* *Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?* In so characteristic a mark, can I mistake the expression of humility, disinterestedness, and truth? When I read these words my affections are raised, and they excite emotions in my soul.

Who then are these men, who, whilst nature is obedient to their voice, are fearful that this obedience should be attributed to their power or piety? How should the mind refuse its assent to such witnesses? How is it possible to suspect such narrations to be mere inventions? And how many more circumstances of the same nature do I discover, which are inseparably connected with these, and which were not at all more likely to present themselves naturally to the minds of these men?

* Acts iii. ver. 12.

CHAP. II.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NARRATIVE OF THE WITNESSES.—WHETHER IT HAS BEEN FORMALLY CONTRADICTED BY EVIDENCES OF THE SAME WEIGHT, AND MADE AT THE SAME TIME.

I KNOW that several parts of the narrative appeared a very short time after the events attested by the witnesses. If these parts are the work of some impostor, he ought undoubtedly to have been cautious not to make his recital too circumstantial, lest he should be more easily detected. And yet what can be more particular than the narrative now before me? I meet with the names of the persons, their qualities, office, habitation, and diseases. I observe the places, the time, the circumstances, pointed out, and numberless minute details, all concurring to describe the event in the most precise manner. In a word, I must

be conscious, that had I been in the place, or existed at the time, when the narrative was published, it would have been perfectly easy for me to have satisfied myself with respect to the truth or falsehood of the facts. And is it natural to imagine, that the obstinate and powerful adversaries of the witnesses neglected doing that which I should have done, had I existed in those times and places? I must therefore search after some evidences, in the history of those times, which formally contradict those of the witnesses: but all I can meet with are vague accusations of imposture, magic, or superstition: I therefore ask, Is it thus that the most circumstantial accounts are to be overturned? But perhaps (I again say to myself) the accounts are lost which formally contradicted those of the witnesses? But why then is not the account of the witnesses lost also? Because it has been most carefully preserved, and transmitted to me, by a numerous society which still exists. But, on the other hand, I observe another society* equally numerous, and still more

* The Jews.

ancient, which, descending by an uninterrupted succession from the first adversaries of the witnesses, and inheriting the hatred which those adversaries bore towards them, as well as their prejudices, might have preserved as easily the evidences against those witnesses, as it has preserved so many other monuments, which they still produce with complacency, and many of which serve to betray them. I even see several weighty reasons, which ought to have engaged that society to preserve carefully all the proofs contradictory to those of the witnesses.

What particularly occurs to me is, that accusation, so odious, so pointed, and so often repeated, with which the witnesses had dared to charge the magistrates of that society, and the astonishing success of the testimony that the witnesses bore to the facts on which they built their accusation. How easy would it have been for the magistrates to contradict this testimony! How much was it their interest to do it! And how great must have been the effect of a juridical and circumstantial deposition,

which, in every page, would have contradicted that of the witnesses? Since, then, the society of which I am speaking cannot produce such a formal evidence, I think I am authorised, by all the rules of sound criticism, to believe that it never was possessed of any authentic documents to oppose to the witnesses.—But it occurs to me, that the* friends of the witnesses, when they came into power, are said to have destroyed every proof repugnant to their testimony. It has not, however, been in their power to annihilate that great society, which was avowedly inimical to them. And they did not become powerful till many centuries after the event, which was the subject of their belief. I must then relinquish this suspicion, which is void of foundation. And, whilst the society in question has nothing to produce, but the most vague accusations of imposture, the witnesses (I remark) have handed down, in *their* writings, informations and interrogatories, made by the magistrates themselves, or by the chief teachers of that so-

* The Christians under Constantine.

ciety, which are positive proofs, that they were far from being indifferent as to what was going forwards in their capital.

I did not indeed suppose any such indifference; it was too improbable. I supposed, on the contrary, that the magistrates or teachers did actually exert their utmost efforts to come to a certain knowledge of the facts. I therefore proceed to the informations and interrogatories, contained in the writings of the witnesses or of their first disciples.

As these writings have never been contradicted in a formal manner, by those whose immediate interest it was to contradict them; I think myself obliged to admit that these writings are of considerable authority.

It is with a singular satisfaction that I read over and over again these interesting interrogatories: and the more I read them, the more I admire the exquisite sense, the singular precision, the noble courage and candour, so conspicuous in the answers.

Truth seems to dart forth from every side, and the bare perusal of them is sufficient to convince us, that such facts are not a mere invention. It is not certainly in such a way as this, that people set themselves to invent.

CHAP. III.

THE MAN LAME FROM HIS BIRTH.

NO sooner had the disciples of Jesus begun (in the midst of the capital), to bear witness to what they called the truth, than they were led before the tribunals. They are examined, questioned, and they openly attest before these tribunals, that which they had already affirmed in the presence of the people.

A man lame from his birth, had been recently restored to the use of his limbs; this lame man was forty years of age.* Two of the witnesses are the reputed authors of this cure. They are sent for by the senators, who propose this question to them, *By what power or by what name have*

* Acts iii. 4.

ye done this? The question is precise and formal. *Ye rulers of the people* (answered the witnesses), *if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you, whole.*

What now is the behaviour of the two fishermen? Do they attempt to ingratiate themselves with their judges? No; they set out by upbraiding them openly with an atrocious crime, and conclude by affirming the very fact which the judges held in the utmost abhorrence.—Here I reason with myself, and my reasoning is very simple:—If *he*, whom the magistrates have crucified, has been crucified justly; if he be not risen from the dead; if the miracle wrought on the lame man be another deceit; these magistrates, who undoubtedly have proofs of all this, will loudly and publicly reproach these witnesses with their audaciousness, their imposture, their malice; and will inflict on them the severest punishment.

I continue reading; *Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it; but, when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred amongst themselves*, and they recalled them, *and commanded them, not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.*

What do I see here? These senators, so prepossessed against the witnesses, and their declared enemies, are not able to silence them! Those very senators, whom the witnesses have censured with so much courage and so little caution, content themselves with *threatening* them and *forbidding* them to teach! The lame man then has been restored. But it was in the name of the crucified Jesus. The crucified man is then risen from the dead. The senators then tacitly admit this resurrection: at least their conduct seems to imply that they cannot prove the contrary.

I cannot reasonably object, that the historian of the fisherman has falsified all this proceeding. For it certainly does not become me, who came into the world 1700 years after this transaction passed, to form a charge against this historian, which should have been brought against him by contemporaries of the witnesses; who nevertheless have *not* brought it, or at least have never been able to prove it.

I learn by this historian, that the consequence of this miracle was the conversion of five thousand men: I do not say that these five thousand men were so many witnesses. I have not their account: But I *will* say, that the conversion of so considerable a number proves the publicity of the fact. Neither can I presume to say that this number is exaggerated; because I have no authentic evidence to oppose to that of the historian, and my simple negative ought not to counterbalance his positive affirmation.

I cannot forbear a few observations on some particular expressions in this very *interesting* recital.

Such as I have, give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

Such as I have, give I thee. The only power he has, is that of making a lame man to walk; and this power is committed to a poor fisherman! *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.* What precision, what sublimity in these words! how well adapted to the majesty of Him who commands all nature!

If we this day be examined of the GOOD *deed done to the impotent man.* It is an act of *pity*, not of *ostentation*, which they wrought: they have made no signs to appear in heaven: they have done a good deed to an impotent man; a good deed! and in all the simplicity of a pure and virtuous heart.

Whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead. No reserve, no management here; no prudential consideration, no personal fears are here predominant: they are then well assured of the fact, and fear not being confuted!

When they spoke to the *people*, they said, *We wot that through ignorance ye did it.* Their language is different when before the tribunal; they disdain to flatter their judges, or to make use of any artifice to conciliate their favour—*Whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead.*

CHAP. IV.

SAINT PAUL.

I PROCEED in the history of the witnesses*, and I quickly meet with the history of a young man, which greatly excites my curiosity and attention.

Although educated by a sage, he was far from practising his moderation. His active, vehement, and courageous disposition; his persecuting spirit, and blind adherence to the sanguinary maxims of a predominant and overbearing sect; excited in him the most vehement inclination to take a distinguished part of the open war, which that sect had proclaimed against the witnesses. He had already assented to, and assisted at the violent death of *one* of the witnesses; but unable to confine his fanatic zeal within the walls of the capital, obtained from

* Acts viii. 9.

the rulers letters, authorising him to persecute the partizans of this new opinion, wherever they should be found.

He sets out, attended by several horsemen, breathing out *threatenings and slaughter*; and, before he arrives at Damascus, becomes himself a minister of the gospel! He enters upon his sacred office, and begins with attesting the facts which the witnesses attest, in that very town wherein he was going to vent his rage against the infant society.

Moral as well as natural order hath its laws; men do not throw off their character on a sudden and without cause; they cannot on a sudden, and without cause, divest themselves of their deep-rooted, their favourite, and, in their own eyes, their best-grounded prejudices; still less the prejudices of birth and education; and least of all those of religion.

Some extraordinary and unexpected event must therefore have occurred on the journey, some more than common motive must have

been employed to convert this man, from being a most furious persecutor, to the most zealous disciple of him whom he persecuted. For I *must* suppose some cause, and indeed some very great cause, to have effected so sudden, so unexampled a change. I learn from himself, and from his historian, what this cause is. A great light from heaven shone around him, the brightness of which deprived him of his sight. He fell to the ground, and he heard a voice from heaven. He immediately becomes an object of the fury of that sect which he had deserted; he is dragged into prisons, carried before the tribunals of his own nation, and of others, and he every where attests, with equal fortitude and constancy, the facts attested by the first witnesses. With a very singular pleasure I follow him, when led before a foreign tribunal, where happily a king of his own nation is present; there I hear him give a very circumstantial account of his conversion. He does not attempt to conceal his former rage against the new sect; he even paints it in the strongest colours*:

* Acts xxvi. 10, 11.

And when they were put to death, (he says) *I gave my voice against them, and I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.* He then proceeds to the extraordinary circumstances which attended his conversion; gives an account of what followed; and concludes by saying, addressing himself to the judge; *For the king knoweth of these things, of which I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner**. This new witness, therefore, as well as the first, entertains no apprehensions of being contradicted concerning the facts; for he talks of *things which were not done in a corner:* and I am not in the least surprized when I read that his speech staggers the king: *Almost thou persuadest me.* The prince, therefore, does not view him in the light of an impostor. This witness had delivered the same things in the midst of the capital, when speaking before a crowded assembly of the people; and was interrupted

* Acts xxvi. 26.

only when he came to combat an ancient and favourite prejudice of that haughty nation*. I find, in the same historian, other very circumstantial proceedings, of which this new disciple is the object, and which are carried on at the request of his countrymen, who had solemnly sworn and conspired to destroy him. I carefully analyze these proceedings, and the farther I pursue my analysis, the more I perceive the probability increase, in support of the facts attested by the witnesses. I moreover meet, in the same historian, with other speeches of this witness, which to me appear master-pieces of reason and eloquence: if this word eloquence, so much prostituted, can be applied to speeches of this nature. I dare not add, that there are some replete with wit; this word would be still more inapplicable to so great a character and such great things. *Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious; for as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription,* TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. *Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you*†.

* Acts xxii. 21. The prejudice on the vocation of the Gentiles.

† Acts xvii. 22, 23.

Some of his speeches are so pathetic, so affecting, that I cannot resist the emotions they raise in me.—*Bonds and afflictions abide me; but none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus. And now behold, I know that ye all shall see my face no more.—I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.**

I am astonished when I observe the number, the nature, the greatness, and the duration, of the labours and trials of this extraordinary personage; and, if the importance of the views, the dignity of the motives, and the obstacles to be surmounted, are the measures of glory, I cannot but consider

* Acts xx. 23, 24, 25, 33, 34, 35.

this person as a most accomplished and heroic character.

But this extraordinary man has himself written. I study his writings, and I am struck with the extreme disinterestedness, the meekness, the pathetic piety, and, above all, with that sublime benevolence which breathes through all his works; the whole race of man finds room in his heart; there is no branch of morality which does not vegetate and fructify within him. He is himself a moral system, which lives, breathes, and acts without ceasing; he is at the same time the precept and the example. And what precepts does he teach?—*Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another. Not slothful in business; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you, bless and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one towards another.*

*Mind not high things, and be not wise in your own conceits.** Is it possible that these ethics, so pure, so elevated, so peculiarly adapted to the wants of universal society, should have been preached by the same man, who breathed forth *threatenings* and *slaughter*, and whose sole pleasure and glory consisted in putting his fellow-creatures to the torture? And how could such a man so suddenly attain to the perfect practice of such morality? He, who came to call mankind to these great duties, had surely *spoken* to him. But what shall I say to that admirable picture of *charity*, so full of warmth and life, which continually captivates my attention in another production † of this finished moralist? And yet it is not the picture itself which engages my attention the most, it is the occasion which gives rise to it. Of all the endowments which man might obtain or exercise, surely there is no one fitter to flatter our vanity than those which are miraculous. Illiterate men, of the lowest class, who suddenly speak foreign tongues, would be very much inclined to make a parade of so extraordinary a

* Romans xii. † 1 Corinth. xiii.

gift, forgetful of its purpose. A numerous society of Neophytes, founded by this illustrious man, soon made an ill use of that gift. He hastens to write to them, and to remind them what ought to be the real use of miracles. He does not hesitate in preferring that sublime benevolence, which he calls charity, to all miraculous endowments; that charity, which, according to him, is the most perfect system of all social virtues—*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*

Whence has this sage learned to make so exact a discernment of things? Why is he not dazzled by so many eminent gifts which he possesses, or *supposes* himself to possess? Would an impostor act in this manner? Whence has he discovered that miracles are *only simple signs for those who do not yet believe?* Who has taught this fana-

tical persecutor to prefer the love of mankind to the most splendid endowments? Can I mistake, in these doctrines and virtues of the disciple, the voice, the ever-efficacious voice, of THAT MASTER, who gave himself up as a sacrifice for the whole race of mankind?

CHAP. V.

THE MAN BORN BLIND.

THE interrogatories contained in the evidence of the witnesses continually awaken my attention.

It is there chiefly that I must search for the sources of the probability of the facts attested. If these interrogatories, as I have already observed, have never been formally confuted by those whose greatest interest it was to contradict them, I must allow the consequences which naturally result from them. Amongst these interrogatories there is one especially which claims my attention, and which I cannot read without feeling a secret pleasure; I mean that of the man born blind, and cured by the divine messenger*. This miracle becomes the cause of great astonishment to all those

* John ix.

who had known the blind man. They are at a loss what to think, and are divided in their opinions. They bring him into the presence of the doctors, who question him, and ask him, how he came to receive his sight? He answers, *He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed, and I do see.*

The doctors are not yet convinced of the fact; they doubt and reason among themselves; they wish to fix their doubts; and, suspecting *that the man was not born blind, they send for his father and mother.—Is this your son, whom ye say was born blind? How then does he now see? His parents answered them, and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now seeth, we know not, or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age, ask him, he shall speak for himself.* The doctors therefore question him again *this man who had been blind from his birth; they again call him a second time before them, and say, Give God the praise; we know that this man who hath opened thine eyes is a sinner. He answered, and said, Whether he be a sinner or no,*

I know not; one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. On this ingenuous answer the doctors recur again to their first question—*What did he do?* They again ask him—*How opened he thine eyes?—I have told you already*, he answers with the same firmness and candour—*wherefore would you hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples?* This answer irritates the doctors—*They revile him—As for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.—Why! herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is*, again replies this man, full of candour and good sense, *and yet he hath opened my eyes*, &c. What ingenuousness, what simplicity, what precision, what well-connected reasoning! If such as these are not the characteristics of truth, by what marks shall we ever discover it?

CHAP. VI.

THE RESURRECTION.

OF all the proceedings contained in this book, there are none assuredly of greater importance than that one which concerns the person of the divine messenger; and on that very account it is also the most circumstantial, the most frequently repeated, and that to which the witnesses most directly and most frequently allude. It is always the centre of their testimony. I find it in the chief parts of the narrative; and on a fair comparison of the passages which respect this important point, they appear to me to be perfectly harmonious.

The divine teacher is taken, examined, and questioned by the judges of his nation; they call upon him to declare who he is; he *declares* himself; his answer is deemed blas-

phemy; false witnesses are produced against him, who exhibit a misconstruction of his words. He is condemned, and led before a supreme and foreign tribunal. There he is again questioned, and makes nearly the same reply. The judge, conscious of his innocence, wishes to release him. The magistrates, who have condemned him, persevere in requiring his death: they intimidate the chief judge, who delivers him up to them. He is crucified and buried. The magistrates seal the stone of the sepulchre, and set a watch over it; and, a short time after, the witnesses attest in the capital, and in the presence of the magistrates themselves, *that he who was crucified is risen from the dead.*

I have brought together the most essential facts: I compare, I analyse them, and I can form only two hypotheses which can possibly account for the conclusion of this affair—either the witnesses have carried off the body, or Jesus is really risen. I must decide between these two hypotheses, for I cannot make out a third. And first, I weigh the particular opinions, the prejudi-

ces, the character of the witnesses: I observe their conduct, their circumstances, the situation of their mind and heart, previous to and since the death of their master.

I afterwards examine the prejudices, the character, the conduct, and the allegations, of their adversaries.

It is only requisite that I should know the country which the witnesses inhabit, to be acquainted, in general, with their opinions and prejudices. I well know that their nation professes to wait for a temporal deliverer, and that he is the ardent object of the prayers and expectations of that nation: the witnesses, therefore, are also in expectation of this deliverer. And in their writings I find a multitude of passages confirming this, which convince me that they are persuaded that he, whom they call their master, must be that temporal deliverer. In vain does this Master attempt to spiritualize their ideas; they cannot discard that national prejudice, which they have so strongly imbibed—*We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.**

* Luke xxiv. 21.

These men, whose ideas are not raised above sensible things, have a simplicity and timidity of character which they themselves do not even dissemble. They continually mistake the sense of their master's discourse; and when he is *laid hold on, they fled.* The most zealous of them all denies him three times, and swears he knows him not; and that ignominious act of cowardice is most particularly mentioned in four of the principal narratives of the witnesses.

I cannot doubt, one single instant, but that they were fully persuaded of the reality of the miracles wrought by their master. I have examined their reasons. They appear to me of the greatest weight.* Nor can I doubt that their adherence to their master was owing to the ideas they had formed as to the design of his mission. The attachment of man has always some foundation; and surely the men of whom I am speaking must have lived in the expectation of some benefit from him, whose disciples they were become. They hoped, therefore, at least, that he would redeem their nation from a foreign yoke. But this mas-

* Vide Part ii. chap. ii. iii. and v.

ter, from whom they expected this great deliverance, is betrayed, given up, forsaken, condemned, crucified, and buried, and with him all their temporal hopes vanish—*He who saved others cannot save himself.* His enemies triumph, and his disciples are humbled, mortified, and confounded.

In such desperate circumstances, would the witnesses form the wild project of carrying off the body of their master? Can one be easily persuaded, that so timorous, so artless a set of people, so unfit for stratagems and intrigues, will enter into so daring a conspiracy? What! those very disciples who, in so pusillanimous a manner deserted their master, will *they* on a sudden contrive so strange a plot, as to carry off his body from the secular power? They must evidently expose themeselves to the greatest perils! they must provoke a certain and a cruel death! And what can be their views in this project? They either are, or are not, persuaded that their master will rise from the dead; if the first, it is obvious, they will resign his body to the Divine power; if the last, all their temporal hopes must vanish. What then can be

their plan in carrying off his body? to publish that he is risen from the dead? But such men as these, men without interest, without fortune, having no authority, can they flatter themselves with the most distant hopes, that so monstrous an imposture will gain credit? But, even were this an easy matter, still the sepulchre is sealed; guards are placed on every side; and these guards have been selected and set by those whose chief concern it was to prevent the imposture. Such preventive measures surely are sufficient to deter those timorous fishermen from any plan of carrying off the body. Men who have neither silver or gold, will *they* attempt to bribe the watch? Men who, on the first appearance of danger, forsook their master, will they attack these guards? Men hated and despised by government, will they so easily find others bold enough to assist them? Can they flatter themselves that these men would not betray them? &c. &c.

But is it a fact, that the sepulchre was sealed, and a watch placed or set over it? is this a fact, I say, well ascertained? for

I find this decisive and important circumstance is mentioned only by one* of the evangelists. This rather surprizes me. I therefore diligently inquire, whether this very essential circumstance has not been contradicted by those whom it so nearly concerned to clear up this fact? and I come to an absolute certainty that it never has. I must then necessarily allow, that the recital of this evangelist remains in its full force; and that the mere silence of the other evangelists does not in the least invalidate the testimony given to this fact.

Independent of this very express testimony, is it not probable that the magistrates, who might justly suspect such an imposture, and who were invested with authority sufficient to prevent it; is it not likely that they would employ every means possible to prevent it? And if they have not employed these means, what reason can I assign for their conduct?

But if I can prove that these magistrates had considered before hand by what means they might prevent such an imposture, then

* St. Matthew, xxvii. 66.

who can doubt but that they had employed these means time enough to prevent it?— *Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again: Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people he is risen from the dead; so the last error shall be worse than the first.* * If then the chiefs of the people have taken the most efficacious means possible to prevent the fact, and every precaution which the case required, have they not thereby deprived themselves of the possibility of supposing that the body was carried off? And yet they endeavour to support the supposition. *They gave large money to the soldiers*, who, instigated by them, spread the report, *that his disciples came by night and stole him away whilst they slept.* † I shall not dwell on the singular absurdity of this report suggested to the soldiers. It is too obvious. How could these soldiers presume to de-

* Matt. xxvii. 63, 64.

† Matt. xxviii. 12, 13.

pose to a fact which was doing *whilst they slept?*

Besides, is it natural to believe, that these selected soldiers, chosen for the very purpose of counteracting a most dangerous imposture, should have given themselves up to sleep? But, another thought occurs to me, still more striking:—It is evidently clear to me, that the magistrates cannot be ignorant of the truth: if they are convinced that the body has really been stolen away, wherefore are notthe soldiers brought to a trial? Why is not the trial made public? What could be more decisive, more proper to put a stop to the progress of the imposture, and infallibly confound the impostors? These magistrates, so directly, so nearly concerned to expose this imposture, do not take this measure, so plain, so obvious, so conformable to justice. they do not even arrest the impostors: they do not confront them with the soldiers: they punish neither the impostors nor the soldiers: they publish no trial: they do not clear up the fact to the public. Neither do their successors clear it up at all better;

they confine themselves, as their ancestors did, to insisting on the imposture.

Further; when these same magistrates, soon after, send for two of the disciples, on account of a cure which had made a great noise;* and these disciples are bold enough to upbraid them with an atrocious crime, and to attest in their presence the resurrection of that man, whom they had crucified; what is the conduct of these magistrates? They are contented with threatening them, and commanding *them to teach no more in the name of Jesus.* † These threatenings do not intimidate the witnesses; they continue to publish openly the resurrection of the crucified teacher, in the same place, and publicly, in the presence of the magistrates. They are again brought before the same magistrates, and persist with the same boldness in their account ‡—*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew; we are his witnesses.* What step do the magistrates now take?—*When they*

* See This Book, Chap. iii.

† Acts iv, 18, 21.

‡ Acts v. 30, 32.

had beaten them, they commanded them that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go! Surely, the judicious reader requires no further observations; he has heard every thing, and feels the strength of the arguments here produced.

CHAP. VII.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE FACT.—REMARKS.—OBJECTIONS.—REPLY.

THUS we have circumstantial facts, facts which have never been contradicted, facts which have been constantly and unanimously attested by witnesses, who seem to be possessed of every qualification requisite (agreeably to the rules of sound logic), to establish the credibility of testimony. * To invalidate such facts, shall I advance, that the magistrates, fearing the people, dared not to take the proper informations, nor to prosecute and publish the witnesses as impostors, nor to punish the authentic proceeding, &c.? But, if the crucified man had, in the course of his life, done nothing to excite the admiration and veneration of the people; if he had wrought

* Vide chap. ii. Book ii.

no miracle; if the people had not, on his account, *blessed God for having given such power to men; if his doctrine*, and his manner of teaching, had not appeared to the people far superior to every thing which their doctors had taught; if they had not held it as a truth *that no man ever spake as he spake*;—wherefore should the magistrates have feared to prosecute juridically the abject disciples of an impostor, as great impostors themselves as their master had been? Wherefore should the magistrates have feared a people so strongly prejudiced, and for so long a time, in their favour, if these magistrates had been able to prove, by public and legal proceedings, that the cure of the man born blind, the resurrection of Lazarus, the healing of the lame man, the gifts of tongues, &c. were only impositions? How easy was it for them to procure the clearest information concerning those facts; and especially, how easy would it have been for them to prove that the witnesses spoke only their mother tongue? And again, what could these magistrates have to fear from the people, if they could have clearly demonstrated to *them, that* the disciples had stolen away

the body of their master? And was this more difficult to ascertain than the rest? &c.

Can there now remain any doubt of the extreme improbability of the first hypothesis, of that which supposes that the body was carried off? Must I not really allow, that the second hypothesis has at least a degree of probability equal to that of any historical fact whatever, taken from the history of that age, or of those ages which immediately followed?

Shall I here draw the odious characters of the principal adversaries of the witnesses? Shall I extract these characters from the writings of their own historian? * Shall I place these characters in opposition to those of the witnesses? Shall I contrast vice to virtue, fury to moderation, hypocrisy to sincerity, falshood to truth?—I should forget that I am only attempting a sketch, not writing a treatise.

Must I again repeat, that the resurrection of the *great* MESSENGER is not an uncon-

* Josephus.

nected fact;* but that it is the chief link of a chain of facts of the same nature, and of a multitude of other facts of various kinds, all which would become inexplicable were the first fact supposed false? If, in any instance whatever, an hypothesis becomes the more probable, when it explains successfully a great number of facts; or a great number of particulars essential to the same fact; am I not compelled, by all the rules of sound logic, to allow, that the first hypothesis explains nothing, and that by the second every thing is explained in a most natural and successful manner? If an hypothesis leads me necessarily to consequences which contradict manifestly what we call moral order;† can I admit that hypothesis in preference to another, the foundation of which rests on moral order itself? Shall I further add, that if Jesus Christ be not risen, He himself has been a notorious impostor? for, by the account of the witnesses themselves, he had foretold his death and resurrection, and instituted a memorial both of the one and of the other.

* Vide Book ii. Chap. v.

† See Book ii. Chap. i.

If then he be not risen from the dead, his disciples must perceive that they were imposed upon by him on the most important point; and if they thought thus, how came they to build such elevated hopes of a future happiness on a resurrection which had not taken place? How could they promise to mankind, in his name, *that* happiness to come? How could they expose themselves, for such a length of time, to such a torrent of opposition, such numberless and severe trials, even to death itself, in support of a doctrine which was founded solely on a falsehood, of the atrocity of which they must be sufficiently convinced? How could men, who made so public, so constant, and apparently so sincere a display of the most tender and exalted love for mankind; how could they be so destitute of common humanity as to deceive, and thereby involve in misery, many thousands of their fellow-creatures? What reward could such notorious impostors expect in another world, for the afflictions which they suffered in this? How could such impostors teach mankind the purest, the most sublime doctrine, a doctrine so well adapted to the necessities of an extensive society? How

again, ——but I have already dwelt long enough on these monstrous oppositions to moral order: they present themselves in so great a number, they are so striking, that a moment's reflection alone is necessary to convince me on which side of the question lies the greater probability.

Shall I raise another objection, and say, that the resurrection of Christ was not sufficiently public, and that he ought to have shewn himself in the capital, and to his judges, after his resurrection? It will be immediately obvious, that we are not concerned to know what God could have done, but plainly to know what he has done. It was to intelligent man, to moral man, that God chose to speak; his intention was not to force man into belief, and leave his understanding unexercised; the question therefore is, only to ascertain to myself, whether the resurrection of Jesus has been accompanied with circumstances sufficiently striking to convince any reasonable man of this extraordinary mission of the divine messenger? Now, these well-established facts, when weighed in the scale of reason, seem to carry irresistible conviction, that every

thing has been done by God, which was necessary, to establish this certainty, so much wanted, so earnestly desired, and so well adapted to the present condition of man. This also must compel us to acknowledge, that the objection respecting the want of publicity in the resurrection, is extremely absurd; since, if we examine this objection, we may easily perceive that every human individual might equally require that Christ should also appear to him, &c.*

* Under the ancient economy, there were miracles or signs of great notoriety; of these I apprehend I can discover the reasons, and shall accordingly point them out. The nation living under this economy, was, properly speaking, one great family, which *was never* to intermix with the neighbouring nations, in order that the great deposit entrusted to them might suffer no alteration.

The government of this family was a *theocracy*; and it was consonant to the spirit of this theocracy, that the minister of the monarch, should be authorized by the monarch himself, to display his commission to the family at large, that is, assembled in a national body.

It was, moreover, agreeable to the same spirit, that the law promulgated by the minister, in the name of the monarch, should be authorized by the most signal and transcendant signs, so as to display the awful majesty of the monarch: and of these signs the whole family were to be spectators. There was still another reason for this dispensation:—The minister of the ancient economy had not been foretold to the nation, by predictions so precise as to leave no room for mistake concerning his person. The

I must not, therefore, say, *This* would have been wise; and God ought to have

great notoriety, therefore, of the miracles and signs which authorized the mission of this minister, were necessarily such as might answer all the purposes of prophecy. This dispensation was undoubtedly adapted to the character and peculiar circumstances of the Jewish nation. It will be easily conceived what ideas these words, *character* and *circumstances*, are intended to convey; and it is needless that I should point them out.

The plan of the new economy was very different. It was not to be confined to one family alone. All the nations of the earth, for a great series of ages, were to be partakers in it. How would it have been possible to assemble in one and the same place all the nations of the world, to authenticate to them the new minister of this new economy, which was to take place of the ancient, to perfect it, and render it universal?

But if the mission of this minister had been foretold, *at sundry times, and in divers manners*, by many prophecies sufficiently circumstantial with respect to the time of his coming, so that the character of his person, his functions, &c. could not reasonably be mistaken by that people, who were the first object of his mission; if other nations could also come to the knowledge of these prophecies; if the minister of this new economy was to be endued with supernatural power and wisdom; if he was *to do works which none other had done; if man had never spoken as this man spoke;* if he was to give to other men the power of doing *the same works, and still greater;* if he was to send them to all nations, to enlighten them, and to signify *the good-will* of the Father of all; if, consequently, he was to endue these messengers with an extraordinary gift, by the means of which they might communicate their thoughts to these nations, and be by them understood——but the intelligent *reader*, the friend of truth, has already anticipated me: and to his judgment I refer these considerations.

done *thus:* but I must say, God has done *thus*, therefore it is wise. What! shall a being so consummately ignorant as I am, presume to determine on the ways of Wisdom itself? The only occupation which appears proportioned to my weak faculties, is to study the ways of that adorable Wisdom, and to feel the value of his unbounded kindness.

There yet remains, however, another circumstance which will require his attention. These miracles of the ancient economy, which had been wrought before the eyes of a whole nation, have not continued from age to age in that nation. All the succeeding generations to our own days, have not seen with their own eyes, the *superb appearance* of the sovereign of the Jews, and yet have strongly adhered to his law; all have been fully convinced of the truth of *this appearance*, and of the divine mission of the first legislator. What then has been the logical foundation of this strong and permanent persuasion? Wherefore does the present generation persevere in the belief entertained by the generations before them? This logical foundation undoubtedly rests on *oral and written tradition.* The proofs, therefore, of the miracles of the ancient economy, as well as of the miracles of the new economy, depend essentially on the rules of testimony.

The question, therefore, amounts to this; namely, Whether the testimonies, on which the mission of the second legislator rests, are inferior in force to those which establish the mission of the first legislator? This important inquiry concerns particularly the *wise men* of that nation, which is dispersed even to this day amongst all people, and which still rejects the mission of the second legislator, clearly foretold by the first, and foretold in a still clearer and more precise manner by later prophets.

CHAP. VIII.

APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE DEPOSITION.—REFLECTIONS ON THAT SUBJECT.

I SAID that there exists a harmony throughout all the various parts of the evidence; that they all appear to have the same scope and design: I nevertheless perceive a great difference both as to the form and the matter; nay, I further discover here and there contradictions, at least they appear so to me. I find difficulties which occur on certain points of genealogy, of places, persons, and facts; and I do not immediately discover a ready solution to these difficulties.

As I have not the least interest to induce me to believe these difficulties insurmountable, I do not set out by imagining they

are so. I have studied the logic of the heart as well as that of the mind; I have also acquired some knowledge of that science called Criticism, with which I ought not to be utterly unacquainted; I bring together the parellel passages; I compare them one with another; I anatomize them; and I borrow the assistance of the best interpreters. I soon perceive the difficulties disappear; the light increases every instant; is diffused on every side; and illumines equally the most obscure parts of the object.

If there be nevertheless corners which, in my opinion, do not receive sufficient light, if there be still remaining some clouds which I cannot effectually disperse, it will never enter into my mind, and still less into my heart, to draw conclusions against the general scope of the evidence; because these obscurities do not destroy, in my opinion, the strong light which is reflected from the great parts of the picture.

I have a right to doubt; philosophical doubt is the path which conducts to truth: but I must be also candid. True philosophy is utterly inconsistent with disingenui-

ty; and true philosophy resides in the heart more than in the head. If, in a critical examination of any work, I direct myself by the safest and most common rules of interpretation; if one of those rules directs me to judge from the general harmony and correspondence of the whole; if, by another rule, I am taught that trifling difficulties can never weaken this whole, more especially when the most essential characters of truth, or at least of probability, are impressed upon it; why should I refuse to apply these rules to the examination of the evidence in question? and why am I not to form my opinion of this evidence by the correspondence of the whole? Do not these apparent contradictions, these difficulties of different kinds, clearly indicate that the authors of the various parts of the evidence have not copied each other; and that each of them has set forth what he received by the testimony of his own senses, or what he had learnt from ocular witnesses? If these different parts of the evidence had agreed more exactly with each other, not only in the form, but in the matter, might I not then have justly suspected, that they all

flowed from the same source, or that they were copies of each other? And would not this natural and legitimate suspicion have weakened, in my opinion, the validity of the account?

It is highly satisfactory to find one of the authors thus begin his recital:

1. *Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,*

2. *Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word;*

3. *It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee, in order, most excellent Theophilus,*

4. *That thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed.*

My satisfaction increases, when I read in the chief publication of one of the first wit-

nesses—*And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.* Or when I find, in the narrative of another—*That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life, that we declare unto you.*

BOOK IV.

CHAP. I.

AUTHENTICITY OF THE WRITTEN EVIDENCE.—THE PROPHECIES.

I PROCEED in my inquiries: I have not examined every side of the question; there are many others; I must, however, confine myself to the principal points.

What method must I follow, to be satisfied of the *authenticity* of the various and most important parts of the evidence?

First, I must be cautious not to confound the *authenticity* of the narrative with the *truth* of it. I fix the sense of the terms, to avoid ambiguity.

By the *authenticity* of any part of the narrative, I understand that degree of certainty which ascertains to me, that this part is indubitably the composition of the author whose name it bears.

The *truth* of a portion of the deposition, will depend upon its conformity with the facts.

From this logical distinction I therefore am taught, that historical *truth* does not depend on the authenticity of history; for I easily conceive, that an history may be conformable to fact, although it may bear an improper name, or even no name at all.

But if I be well assured of the *authenticity* of the history, and if the veracity of the historian be well known to me, the *authenticity* of the history will, in some measure, convince me of the *truth* of it, or at least will render it very probable.

The book which I have under examination did not fall from heaven. As well as every book which I have read, this book *has* been written by men; I therefore am

warranted in judging of the *authenticity* of this book, by the same rules which direct my judgment of others.

How am I to be satisfied that Thucydides, Polybius, Tacitus, are truly the authors of those histories which bear their names? It is from tradition that I learn it: I go back from century to century; I consult the monuments of those different ages; I compare them with the histories themselves; and the general result of my inquiries is, that those histories have been ever attributed to those authors whose names they bear.

I cannot agreeably to reason, suspect the fidelity of this tradition; it is too ancient, too constant, too uniform, and it has never been called in question.

I follow, therefore, the same method in my inquiries concerning the *authenticity* of the narrative in question; and I have the same general and essential results.

But because the history of Peloponnesus was not of so much importance to the Greeks, as that of the Great Delegate to his

first disciples, I cannot doubt but that these last have employed much more care to ascertain the *authenticity* of this history, than the Greeks have taken to ascertain that of Thucydides.

A society which was strongly persuaded that the book I am speaking of contained the assurances of an eternal life; a society afflicted, despised, persecuted, and whose sole comfort and support in their trials was to be found in that book; would such a society have suffered themselves to have been imposed upon as to the *authenticity* of a narrative which every day became more and more precious to them?

A society, in the midst of which the very authors themselves of the narrative had lived, and which they themselves had governed for the space of many years, would it have wanted means to ascertain the authenticity of their writings? Would there have existed a perfect indifference as to making use of these means? Was it more difficult for this society to be convinced of the authenticity of these writings, than for any *other* society whatever to ascertain the au-

thenticity of a writing attributed to any well-known person, or to one who should assume his name? Could particular and numerous societies,* to whom the first witnesses had addressed several epistolary compositions, could they be imposed upon concerning the authenticity of such writings? Could they entertain the least doubt whether or not these witnesses had written to them, whether they had answered the many questions put to them, whether these witnesses had lived in the midst of them, &c.?

I bring myself as near as possible to the first age of that great society founded by the WITNESSES; I consult the most ancient monuments; and I discover that, almost at the very birth of that society, its members were divided on several points of doctrine. I enquire what was then agitated among the different parties, and I see that those who were called *innovators* † appealed, as well

* The Churches founded by the Apostles.

† They were also called *heretics*: but it is to be observed, that the name of *heretics* was frequently given to oriental philosophers, who were not born within the pale of the church, and who, properly speaking, were not Christians. These philosophers asse-

as the others, to the narrative of the first witnesses, and that they acknowledged the authenticity of it.

I further discover, that the adversaries * of these sects (enlightened adversaries, and almost contemporaries with the primitive disciples), did not contest the authenticity of the chief parts of the narrative.

I meet with this narrative frequently cited by writers † of the greatest authenticity,

ciated divers dogmas of Christianity with those of oriental philosophy, or of that philosophy of which Zoroaster was supposed to be the author. The famous sect of *Gnosties*, divided into so many different branches, was not in the least a Christian sect: it was a philosophical sect, which, to the dogmas of the magi, joined those of Christ more or less altered: proofs of this may be seen in the last volume of the excellent treatise on the Truth of the Christian Religion, written by my countryman, Mr. Vernet.

* The Pagan authors of the first ages, Celsus, Porphyrus, Julian, &c.

† The apostolic fathers, and their immediate successors. I might here quote passages of Justin, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clemens, Alexandrinus, Origen, Cyprian, &c. which would prove, that all these fathers acknowledged as *authentic* no other gospels but those four which at this time compose our sacred code. But such details are foreign to the design of my work, and such a display of erudition would be misplaced in inquiries of this nature. I wish only to present to my reader the most essential and striking circumstances. It is enough that I am ready to exhibit the

who lived very near this first age, and who professed to acknowledge the *authenticity* of its principal parts. I compare these quotations with the narrative which I have before me, and I cannot but assent to their conformity.

In the continuation of my inquiries, I find that a short time after the society I am speaking of was formed, a number of forged narratives were published to the world, some of which were quoted as true, by respectable teachers of that society. I am therefore very much inclined to conclude, that it was not so difficult a thing to impose on that society and its leaders, as I at first imagined.—This excites equally my attention and suspicion, and I undertake a

proofs, if called for.—In this note I shall therefore confine myself to Origen alone, who thus expresses himself:—*I know, by a constant tradition, that the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are the only ones which have been acknowledged without any dispute by all the church of God that is under heaven.* Those of my readers who wish for further particulars on the *authenticity* of the gospels, may consult the well-written and learned discourse of Mr. Beausobre, *History of Manichæism*, vol. i. and the excellent work of Mr. Bergier, intitled, *The Certainty of the Proofs of Christianity*; many interesting things, on this important subject, are also to be met with in the learned notes of Mr. Seigneux, on Addison.

closer examination on this delicate point. I soon perceive that this is the proper place to employ my logical distinction, between the *authenticity* of a writing, and the *truth* of it. If a writing may be *true*, although not *authentic;* the supposititious narratives in question might be *true*, although they were not in the least *authentic*. Those contemporary teachers who quoted them, undoubtedly well knew whether they were conformable to the essential facts, and I am satisfied that proofs are not wanting to ascertain that conformity. They were therefore rather unauthentic histories, than false histories, or romances.

I further discover that the teachers, of whom I have spoken, very seldom quoted these unauthentic histories, whilst they very frequently quoted those which we account authentic. I perceive further, that there were unauthentic histories, which were no other than the authentic history itself, occasionally modified or interpolated.

I am not at all surprized at the great number of unauthentic histories which then *appeared;* the wonder is, that there were

not more.* I can easily conceive that the zealous disciples of the chief witnesses may

* The learned Fabricius, in his account of the apocryphal gospels, records to the number of fifty of these false gospels: it is however to be observed, that there are several, which differ only in their title.

Beausobre, in his excellent History of Manicheism, vol. i. p. 453, undertakes to shew, that many of these apocryphal gospels were only the gospel of St. Matthew, more or less altered or changed. Amongst others, those, according to the Hebrews, the Egyptians, the Ebionites, St. Bartholomew, St. Barnabas, &c. come directly under this predicament. That nice critic carefully distinguishes the apocryphal, or unauthentic writings, which appeared in the first century, from those which appeared in the centuries following: these last, both as to the doctrine and facts, were much less exact than the former: the reason is not difficult to be assigned:—the false doctrines began to multiply only after the death of the first witnesses; and it was very natural, that men who receded more or less from the received doctrine, should alter the truth, more or less in their writings. The express testimony, however, of such writers, in support of the most essential facts, is particularly remarkable and convincing.

After all, were it argued that the apocryphal writings destroy the authenticity of the canonical, I should answer, with our judicious critic, p. 462, "It might as well be said, that there "exist no true facts, because there are false ones; no true histories, because there are fabulous ones; no true coin, because "counterfeit coin is to be met with." Further, this writer says, "If it be asked in what the apocryphal writers of the first century differed from the true, it will be seen, that this difference "consisted chiefly in some particulars of the life of our Saviour, "which were either taken from or added to the gospels; in "some words or sentences ascribed to our Saviour, and omitted "by our Evangelists, such as, for instance, these words of our

have been naturally led to write what each had heard his master say, and may have given to their* narration a title similar to that of the authentic pieces. Such histories might easily be conformable to the essential facts, since their authors had them from the mouths of the first witnesses, or at least from their first disciples.†

I also find, that the different sectaries had their histories,‡ which differed more or

"Saviour, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.* Euthalius "relates, that this sentence was to be met with in the book in- "titled, *The Doctrine of the Apostles.* These sentences were "taken from some books admitted amongst the Christians, or "preserved by tradition. Hence several passages inserted in "the gospels by the transcribers, and which St. Jerome struck "out when he reformed the copies of the most antient MSS."

* The apocryphal gospels, known by the names of St. James, St. Thomas, &c.

† The life of our Saviour was so beautiful, his character so sublime, his doctrine so excellent, the miracles, by which he confirmed it, so striking and numerous, that it was impossible that many writers should not undertake to compose an account of him; and thus were produced several histories of our Saviour, more or less exact. St. Luke, in speaking of these narrations and gospels, which preceded his, intimates their imperfection, but does not condemn them as bad or fabulous books.—*Beausobre's Discourse on the Authenticity, &c. History of Manicheism*, vol. i. p. 449.

‡ All the *false gospels* of these different sects, were not merely historical writings. There were some which were almost en-

less from the authentic history; but I find no difficulty in convincing myself, that these histories, though malicious forgeries, contained the greater part of the essential facts which had been attested by the chief witnesses.* Many of these sectaries seem

tirely doctrinal, and from which certain sects collected together into a sort of system their particular opinions. Such was, for instance, the gospel of *Valentine*, or of the Valentinians, to which this sect had given the name of the *gospel of Truth*. Such again was a book, which the oriental philosophers, known by the name of *Gnostics*, intitled the Gospel of Perfection, Ibid. 454. See note †.

* I mean, the miracles, the resurrection, and ascension of our Saviour. It is true, that there were sects who denied his having a body like ours, and pretended that his death and resurrection were mere appearances; but this strange idea so directly repugnant to the spirit and letter of the sacred text, is a proof that these sects acknowledged the validity of the testimony given to the *resurrection of our Saviour*; since their error did not consist in denying the resurrection, but in explaining it by mere appearances. They agreed, therefore, as to the fact; and, because the *incarnation* was not consonant to the ideas they had formed to themselves of the person of our Saviour, they invented a system of *appearances*, to reconcile their ideas with the evidence of the fact.

The question, therefore, in the earlier ages, was not, whether our Saviour had wrought miracles, was risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven: The evidences for these facts were too recent, too numerous, too weighty, and the tradition too certain, to allow of any reasonable doubt. The different sects, therefore, as well as the orthodox, acknowledged these facts; and their disputes related solely to certain points of doctrine.

greatly exasperated against the party which was adverse to them; and, since they inserted in their histories the same essential facts, which that party professed to believe, I cannot but consider so great a conformity between the opposite parties, as the strongest presumption in favour of the authenticity and truth of the narrative which I have before my eyes.

I observe still further, that the society which is the faithful depository of the doctrine, and of the narratives of the witnesses, never failed, as well as its teachers, to remonstrate against the sectaries and their writings, and to appeal constantly to the authentic writings as the supreme and

In our times both the doctrine and facts are matters of controversy; and now, that seventeen centuries are elapsed, objections are heaped on objections, and doubts on doubts, against facts which neither were nor could be contradicted by the contemporaries of all the parties, who were most deeply concerned to ascertain the truth, and best able to come at it. I allow, however, that it is agreeable to the true spirit of an age which bears the pompous name of *philosophical*, not to credit the miracles of the gospel till after the most logical and critical examination of them. I only ask whether it would be truly *philosophical* to reject them *without* such an examination? And I ask further, whether, *after* such an examination, it be *possible*, on the principles of sound philosophy, to reject them?

common judge of all their controversies. I learn also from the history of that society,* that they took particular care to read these writings weekly in their assemblies; and that these writings were precisely those which are handed down to this day, as the authentic narrative of the witnesses.

I cannot, therefore, consistently with sound criticism, suppose that this society was easily imposed upon concerning the authenticity of the numerous writings published in the midst of it.† If I have any reasonable doubt remaining on this essential point, a remarkable fact occurs, which will soon clear it up: namely, that this society, so far from admitting too lightly as authentic, writings which were not acknowledged to be such, suspected for a long time the authenticity of various books, which after a long and careful ex-

* Ecclesiastical history.

† The ancient fathers had three methods of distinguishing the apocryphal writings that were spread abroad in the Christian church.—The first was, the preaching of the first witnesses, and of their immediate successors, which was preserved and perpetuated in each particular society.—The second was

amination, were afterwards received as original compositions of the witnesses.*

the constant, perpetual, and uniform testimony, which the whole primitive society had given to the writings of the first witnesses, and to those of their first disciples; a testimony which the fathers found delivered in the writings of the rulers of the Christian society, and which they gathered also from tradition. And on this they might so much the better depend, as the chain of witnesses was very far short, and the witnesses themselves of the highest authortiy.—Lastly, the third method consisted in the comparison, which the fathers never failed to make, of the apocryphal with the authentic writings; the originals of which, or at least the most original copies, still existed. What method can be safer to judge of false relations, than comparing them with other relations, the authenticity of which is beyond dispute?

* This fact is assuredly a strong proof, that the fathers did not admit without examination all the writings which were handed about in the churches. And the great care which they took to distribute them into different classes, according to their degree of authenticity, is an additional proof. The indefatigable and profound Origen, who lived in the third century, distributed them into three classes; in the first, he placed the truly authenticated writings; the apocryphal, in the second; and the mixed or doubtful, composed the third. Amongst others, it was in this last class he placed the second epistle of St. Peter, the second and third of St. John, the epistle of St. Jude, &c. The judicious and learned Eusebius, the father of ecclesiastical history, who flourished in the following century, made almost a similar division.—The excellent discourse of Mr. de Beausobre, on the authenticity of the Evangelical Writings (*History of Manicheism, vol.* 1. *p.* 438) may be consulted on this subject. Men therefore capable of making such logical and critical distinctions, did not receive indiscriminately all the writings, which fell into their hands.

Another still more remarkable fact occurs, in support of this. I read in the history of the times, that the members of the society of which I am speaking, exposed themselves to the greatest punishments, rather than give up to their persecutors those books which they reputed sacred and authentic, and which those violent persecutors committed to the flames.* Can I presume that the most zealous advocates for the glory of Greece, would have thus sacrificed themselves, to save the writings either of Thucydides or Polybius?

If I afterwards direct my attention towards the accounts given of the manuscripts

* I should be ill understood, were it imagined that I exhibit this remarkable fact as a proof of the authenticity and truth of those books; a Turk might expose himself to be burnt for the Koran; but a Turk, who should expose himself to the faggot, for the Koran, would not be a proof of the authenticity or truth of the Koran. This may be easily conceived, without being a very nice critic. But, on the other hand, it would be very unreasonable not to allow, that a Turk could not exhibit a stronger proof of the sincerity of his faith, and adherence to that faith, than by exposing himself to be burnt for the Koran. It would then remain, to compare the proofs which the Turk would exhibit, in support of his opinion, with those which the primitive Christians had of the authenticity and truth of their sacred books; and these are the proofs which I have endeavoured to collect, in an abridged manner, in these inquiries.

containing the narrative, I shall not find it difficult to convince myself, that the principal parts of that narrative have, in those manuscripts, the names of the same authors to whom the society of which I speak had always ascribed them; and this proof will be the more convincing, in proportion to the early date of some of these manuscripts, which may be traced up to the highest antiquity.*

In support, therefore, of the authenticity of the narrations, I have the most ancient, the most constant and uniform testimony of the society which is the depository of them; and, besides this, I have the testimony of the most ancient innovators, and of the earliest adversaries of Christianity, and the authority of the more original manuscripts. What can I then oppose to so many united testimonies, of so great weight and notoriety? Am I better qualified than were the first innovators, or the first adversaries of the gospel, to contradict the invariable and unanimous testimony of the primitive so-

* Amongst others, the Vatican manuscript; and that of Alexandria, supposed to be of the fourth or fifth century.

ciety? And is there any book of the same date, the authenticity of which rests on so many solid, extraordinary, and striking proofs, and of so many different kinds?

CHAP. II.

WHETHER THE WRITTEN NARRATIVE HAS BEEN ALTERED OR FORGED IN ITS ESSENTIAL PARTS?

I CANNOT lay much stress on the possibility of the authentic text having been altered: neither can I admit that this text may have been forged. At first sight, it appears very improbable it should have happened during the life of the authors (the Apostles); their opposition and authority would presently have confounded the forgers.

It appears equally improbable, that such forgeries should have taken place immediately after the death of the authors; their instructions and their writings were too recent, and already in too many hands.

The improbability seems to increase indefinitely during the following ages; for it very plainly appears, that it would increase in proportion to the prodigious number of copies, and the multitude of versions, which were continually making from the authentic text, and which were dispersed through every part of the known world: How could so many copies, so many versions, be falsified at the same time? Nay, how would it be possible for such an idea to come into any man's mind?

I know, moreover, that the history of the times proves, that the first innovators did not begin writing till after the death of the first witnesses. Had these innovators undertaken to falsify the writings of the witnesses, or those of the most eminent disciples, in order to countenance their private opinions, would not so* numerous and vigilant a society, the guardians of these writings, have powerfully opposed such a fraud?

And if, to confute with greater advantage these innovators, the society itself had

* The Christian church.

been bold enough to falsify the authentic text, would the innovators, who themselves appealed to this text, have kept silence on the discovery of such impostures? This also applies to the idea of suppositious or counterfeit gospels being substituted in the room of the real ones. It appears to me not less improbable, that in any particular time the entire writings ascribed to the witnesses may have been forged by others, than that any parts of their narrative should be falsified.

The more I consider, the more perfectly am I convinced, that the continual and multiplied divisions of the society founded by the apostles, must naturally have preserved the text in its original integrity.

If these divisions grew at last into open and cruel wars; if the belligerent parties constantly appealed to the authentic text as the irrefragable arbiter of their quarrels; if, finally, a* new method was discovered to multiply *ad infinitum*, and with equal precision and dispatch, the copies of the authentic text;—does not reason compel

* The art of printing.

me to grant, that length of time has by no means weakened the credibility of the evidence, and that the writings produced, as those of the witnesses, are exactly those very writings which were always attributed to them ?*

* I have been extremely brief. Consult the note which the translator of the celebrated Ditton has put at the bottom of page 46, vol. ii. 1728.

This is the substance of the reasoning of that translator, who, as it is well known, was a very able critic.

The question is this, " Whether the *written testimony*, which " we have in these days, is the same which the apostles preached " and wrote ?—The certainty of this, many have attempted to " weaken, either by calculations of probability, which dimi- " nishes every day, or by the number of various readings, which " create, in their opinion, a suspicion that the sacred books, " which we now read, are not those of the apostles. It seems " to me, that those calculations and suspicions fall to the " ground, if we divide the several ages of the church into four " *periods*.

" The first is, from the time of the apostles to the reign of " Constantine. The second, from that prince down to the tem- " poral dominion of the popes. The third, from the beginning " of the papal empire to the age of printing, which was pretty " nearly that of the Reformation.

" Now, after the fairest estimate, I find that the certainty " of the written testimony has increased, rather than diminished, " during these four periods. In the first, which was a time of " continual persecution or oppression for the Christians, this " certainty must have been very strong, to have kept up their

"courage and fortitude. The second was a tempestuous time "for the church; they were wholly engaged in cruel disputes on "their religion; and, had the books, to which all parties ap- "pealed, been forged in the preceding period, the fraud would "have been naturally discovered in this."—When afterwards, in the third period, the establishment of the temporal power of the popes had created new disputes in the church, it is plain that the *authenticity of the apostolic writings* became the more certain, as the contending parties equally laid claim to the authority of these *writings*, and as each of the parties seemed to the other to recede from the spirit or letter of the sacred text.

Lastly, Under the fourth period was produced the famous discovery of printing; and almost at the same time the great schism, which then divided, and still divides, the church. What remains of this argument is plain, and hence, therefore, it is unnecessary for me to pursue it.

Thus, by a particular dispensation of Providence, the divisions of the Christian society have contributed to preserve, in its primitive integrity, the *venerable charter of immortality*.

CHAP. III.

VARIOUS READINGS.—SOLUTION OF SOME DIFFICULTIES ARISING FROM THEM.

THE printed narrative, therefore, which lies before me, is the transcript of the best manuscripts which have been transmitted to these times; and these manuscripts represent the ancient and original manuscripts, of which they are copies.

But how many alterations of different kinds may not these manuscripts have undergone by length of time; by the revolutions in states and societies; by the carelessness, negligence, and unskilfulness of the transcribers? And how many other causes of alteration do I not discover? I must not conceal from myself this difficulty. And can I now flatter myself, that the authentic evidence of the witnesses is

come down to me in its original purity, through the space of seventeen centuries, and after having passed through the hands of so many thousand persons, the greater part of whom were, perhaps, either weak or ignorant? I pursue this important point of criticism, and am alarmed at the prodigious number of different readings. I observe a skilful critic,* who discovers not less than thirty thousand. This critic flatters himself, nevertheless, that he has exhibited the most perfect copy of the evidence of the witnesses, and asserts, that he has compiled it from above ninety manuscripts collected from all parts, and collated it with the nicest exactness. It is with difficulty that I recover from my astonishment; and this moment of amazement does not easily admit reflection. I must carefully guard against these first impressions, and make a most scrupulous inquiry into the causes of this prodigious number of variations. A multitude of reflections here offer themselves to my mind. I consider the most essential of them. It is true, that I am acquainted with no ancient

* Dr. Mill.

book which contains near so many various readings as that which I have now under examination. But ought I to be much surprised at this? Ever since there have been books in the world, was there ever any one so much read, copied, translated, commented on, in so many places, and by so many readers, transcribers, translators, and commentators, as this? The most laborious, the most studious man, might spend his life in reading and collating the different versions which have been made of this book in various languages, from the first moment of its publication. A book (I have already made this observation) which contained the pledge of eternal life, must it not have appeared the most important of all books to that society which was intrusted with it, which acknowledged its authenticity and truth, and which has transmitted this precious deposit from age to age? I am therefore no longer astonished at these thirty thousand various readings. It is in the nature of things, that the more the copies of a book are multiplied, the more numerous, of consequence, are its various readings. My surprise will be entirely removed, if, reverting to this learned

critic, I find from him, that these thirty thousand *variations* have been formed, not only from the copies of the original text, but also from those of all the different versions, &c. I run over these variations, and I satisfy myself with my own eyes, that they do not affect the essential points, nor those which constitute the basis of the evidence. Here I find one word substituted for another; there, one or more words transposed or omitted; in a third place, some remarkable words which seem to have passed from the margin into the text, and which do not occur in the most original manuscripts.* If, notwithstanding the collection of the various readings in the works of Cicero, Ho-

* Most people are aware that the epistles of St. Paul contain whatever is essential in the gospels. The authenticity of thirteen of these epistles has never been called in question; the authenticity only of the epistle to the Hebrews has been questioned; and since then it has been attributed to that apostle, at least as to its contents. It is an observation of the critics, that there are fewer various readings in these epistles than in the gospels, "because the transcribers, in writing the histories, or "parallel discourses, having in their mind the expressions of "another evangelist, might easily insert them in that which "they were copying. They even appear to have purposely "done this sometimes, that they might explain one passage by "another. This has seldom happened in St. Paul's epistles."—*Preface* to the Epist. of St. Paul, N. T. of Berlin, 1741, page 3.

race, and Virgil, the most severe critics think that they possess the authentic texts of these authors, why should I not believe that I have also the authentic text of the records in question? If the variations of these records were a sufficient reason to reject them, should I not be obliged of consequence, if I acted consistently, to reject all the books of antiquity?

This remark brings me back to the reflections of the same nature which I made in the second chapter, relative to the real or pretended contradictions of the gospel-evidence. If I am to reason consistently on this subject, I must conform myself to the rules of sound criticism; and I must form my judgment of this book, in the same manner, and by the same method, that I should judge of any other book whatever.

But a book designed by Divine Wisdom to increase the light of reason, and to afford to mankind the most positive assurances of a life to come—ought not such a book to have been secured by that wisdom from the possibility of alteration? And if it had been so preserved, would not that

alone have been the most demonstrative proof that it was the dictate of the supreme legislator?

I shall not attempt to wave the objection: truth is my aim; I seek after it, ever fearful of mistaking the shadow for the substance. What is it then that I now require? I require that Providence should have miraculously interposed to preserve unaltered this precious book, which it seems to have abandoned, like all others, to the dangerous influence of second causes.

I do not as yet distinctly see what it is I desire. I perceive, in general, the necessity of an extraordinary intervention to preserve the evidence in its native purity. What I wish then amounts to this, that Providence had, in a miraculous manner, inspired or guided all the transcribers, all the translators, all the commentators, of every age and of every place; or had prevented the wars, the conflagrations, the inundations, and, in general, all the revolutions which have caused the loss of the original writings of the witnesses.

But would not this extraordinary intervention have been a perpetual miracle? And would a perpetual miracle have been any miracle at all? Would such an intervention have been consistent with the order of eternal Wisdom?* If natural means have sufficed to preserve, in its primitive integrity, the substance of this necessary evidence, would it be very philosophical in me to require a perpetual miracle to prevent the substitution, transposition, or omission of a few words? I might as well require a perpetual miracle to prevent the errors of every individual in matters of faith,† &c. I blush at my objection, and acknowledge the unreasonableness of my desires. The only thing which makes them appear pardonable in my own eyes is, that they were formed in the sincerity of an honest heart, earnestly inquisitive after truth, but not discovering it at first view.‡

* Vide ch. xi. a note of this book.

† See what I have said on the nature and end of miracles, ch. vi. book i. and ch. ix. book ii.

‡ I might have easily entered into more minute particulars on the authenticity of the sacred books, the alterations of various kinds to which these books have been subject, the various

readings, the suppositious pieces, and many other points of history and criticism, which I have hardly touched upon. I have frequently reverted to this remark, and I could not too frequently recur to it, that the nature and design of my work might not be misunderstood. So much has been written by men of learning, within the two last centuries, that much erudition may be displayed at a very small expence, by consulting and making abstracts from their works. But, as I had no wish to make a shew of borrowed erudition, and as I never approved of mere compilations; as my intention was not to write a compleat historical and critical treatise on the proofs of Christianity; as I wished only to seize, and impress on others, the philosophical and moral parts of these proofs, it was my business to apply myself chiefly to that which constituted this philosophical and moral part. I endeavoured to cling to the body and main branches of the tree, and to give up the boughs and leaves to the philologist by profession, who is better able than I am to manage the thorns of criticism. The readers, also, whom I had peculiarly in view, would give me little credit for these scientific details. It is, moreover, well known, that in treating a subject extremely copious, one may easily become diffuse, but that much art is required to be concise. Lastly, The proportions of a well-made book ought to be like those of the human frame; their extremities must bear a relation to the head and body. If, therefore, I am censured by any critic for not having enlarged further on any particular article, I intreat him to consider, that it is *my* work, not his, that I am composing. A philosopher would never engage in the proofs of Christianity, if these proofs rested on the almost infinite multiplicity of minute details, which form the labyrinth of modern criticism. The stately temple of truth is not placed in this labyrinth—SUPREME WISDOM has made its access easier to mankind—The roads leading to it are neither intricate nor dark—Good sense and reason stand at the entrance, and are commissioned to introduce the sincere friends of truth and virtue

CHAP. IV.

THE TRUTH OF THE WRITTEN EVIDENCE.

IF I have sufficiently satisfied myself of the authenticity of this evidence, which is the great object of my inquiries; If I am morally certain that it has been neither forged nor essentially altered; is it posssible for me, with any reason, to entertain the least doubt of its truth?

I have already observed, that the truth of an historical work, is its conformity with fact. If I have sufficiently proved to myself, that the miraculous facts contained in the written evidence of Christianity, are of such a nature, as renders them incapable of being forged, or of being admitted as true, if false in themselves; if it has been established, also on the most solid grounds, that the witnesses who publickly and unanimously attested them, could

neither deceive nor be deceived concerning them—can I possibly reject their evidence, without doing violence not only to all the rules of sound logic, but even to the most common principles of human conduct.*

A striking reflection here occurs to me: —were it even possible that I could entertain any reasonable doubts concerning the authenticity of the historical writings of the witnesses; if my doubts arose from the circumstance of these writings† not having been delivered to any particular society, with a direct charge of preserving them; still, however, I should not be able to form the smallest doubt, respecting the epistles addressed by the witnesses themselves, to those particular and numerous societies which they had founded and governed, especially if I consider how greatly these societies were concerned in the preservation of these invaluable letters of their own founders. I therefore read these letters with all the attention they deserve, and I

* Vide ch. i. ii. iv. v. viii. book ii.

† The four gospels.

perceive that they every where admit as true the account of the miraculous facts contained in the historical writings, and that they frequently refer to them as the immoveable basis of their belief and doctrine.

CHAP. V.

THE PROPHECIES.

IF the legislator of nature, not satisfied with employing that language of signs,* which spoke chiefly to the senses, had also foretold, at sundry times and in divers manners, the mission of his Delegate; this would surely be a new and striking proof of the truth of that mission, and a proof which would greatly increase the assemblage of probabilities, already so considerable, which I have brought together in support of the doctrine of immortality.

This proof would strike me much more, if, by a particular dispensation of supreme wisdom, the oracles of which I am speaking had been committed to the care of the

* The miracles, Chap. iv. Part xvi. Phil. Paleng. Chap. i. *ii. Book* i. of these Inquiries.

very adversaries of the DELEGATE, and his disciples; and if these first and most obstinate adversaries had constantly professed to apply these oracles to that divine *Messenger* who was to come.

I therefore open this book*, which to this day is held forth as authentic and divine, by the descendants, in a direct line of those very men who have crucified the MESSENGER OF HEAVEN, and persecuted his ministers and first disciples. I peruse this book, and I meet with a passage in it† which excites in me the greatest astonishment; I think I am reading an anticipated and circumstantial history of Christ; I discover all the features of his character, and the principal particulars of his life; in a word I think I am reading the very evidence of the witnesses themselves.

I cannot withdraw my attention from this surprising portrait: what features! what

* The Old Testament.

† Isaiah, liii.—This prophet was of the royal race, and the first of the great prophets; he prophesied about seven centuries before the Christian era. It has been said, and with reason, of this prophet, that he was in some sort a *fifth* evangelist.

colouring! what agreement with facts! How just, how natural are the emblems! Emblems, did I say? It is not the emblematical portrait of a very distant futurity; it is a faithful representation of something present, and that which is not yet in being, is painted as though it were.

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form or comeliness: and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought

as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

He was taken from prison, and from judgment, and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong: because he

poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

. . . . . *He shall be exalted, and extolled and be very high.*

As many were astonished at thee; (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men)!

HE, who described thus to future ages the *Day-spring from on high*, could he also proclaim the time of its rising? I can scarcely give credit to my senses, when I read, in another part of the same book, that admirable prediction, which almost seems a chronology composed after the event.

* *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy*

* Daniel, ix.—He was the last of the four great prophets, and was born 616 years before Christ: he was led captive to Babylon towards 606, and instructed in all the sciences of the Chaldeans; he was raised to the first dignities of the empire, and died towards the end of the reign of Cyrus, aged 90.

It is well known, that the prophecies of Daniel are those which have chiefly exercised the sagacity and learning of the ablest commentators; I might add too of the most skilful astronomers. One of these, well known to me, and whose premature

people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy.

Know therefore and understand, that

death I shall ever regret, had made astronomical discoveries from these admirable prophecies, which astonished two of the first astronomers of our time, Messrs. de Mairan and Cassini.—I speak of the late Mr. de Chezeaux, who died in 1751, aged 33; whose uncommon knowledge and surprising information were adorned by a modesty, candour and piety, still more uncommon. —See the advertisement to his posthumous memoirs on various subjects of astronomy and mathematics; Lausanne, 1754, 4to. a work little known, but well deserving the attention of the learned: yet not easily understood, unless by those who are initiated in the secrets of the sublimest astronomy.

The following are the words of the illustrious Mairan, to this young astronomer:—"There is no possibility of rejecting the "truths and discoveries which are proved in your dissertation; "but I cannot conceive how, and for what reason they are so "clearly contained in holy writ. Who could have imagined "that improvements in astronomy, and a degree of precision "superior to that resulting from calculation, on certain very dif- "ficult points of that sublime science, should be derived from the "study of a prophet?"

The reader, desirous of forming to himself an idea of the chronological and astronomical discoveries made by Mr. de Chezeaux, in the prophecies of Daniel, will find a very precise abstract of them, at the end of the third volume of the ADDISON of Mr. CORREVON, printed at Geneva, 1771.

from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks; and threescore and two weeks. . . . .

And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself. . . .

And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease.

I know that these weeks of the prophecy are weeks of years, each of seven years. The inspired writer is therefore speaking of an event which was not to take place till 490 years afterwards.

By history I am informed of the time of the coming of *that Christ*, which the prophecy foretells. I therefore go back from this Christ as far as 490 years; for the event will be the most faithful interpreter of the prophecy.

I arrive therefore at the reign of that prince,* from whom came *the last edict*† *for the re-establishment* of the nation held captive within the dominions of that prince; and it is from the hands of that very nation itself, that I receive this prediction, which is the most powerful reproof and conviction of their incredulity,

* Artaxerxes, L. M. towards the twentieth year of his reign, according to some chronologists, and the seventh according to Prideaux. This celebrated writer has shown, that if the *seventy weeks* are calculated by beginning with the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes, L. M.; or dating from the edict of that prince granted to Esdras; the *seventy weeks*, or 490 years, are found, month by month, from that edict, until the death of Christ. Amazing precision! Marvellous conformity with the event! Can chance thus direct things? Can a judicious and impartial mind reject such proofs? Vide the History of the Jews, by that learned Englishman, vol. ii. p. 10. and following, of the edition 1722.

Mr. de Chezeaux was also engaged in inquiries concerning the seventy weeks of Daniel, and had embraced the opinion of Prideaux, as being the most consonant to history, and the best method of calculating the times of the prediction. Vide *the short account of the astronomer of Lausanne, inserted in the third vol. of the Addison of Mr. de Correvon, p.* 332. The same chronological result, as that of the English historian, will there be found.

† Two anterior edicts had been given; the first was granted by Cyrus, in the first year of his reign at Babylon, about 537 before Christ; the second edict was given by Darius, son of Hystaspes, about 518 years before Christ.

Shall I doubt the authenticity of writings, which contain such predictions as these? But the nation to whose care they have been constantly committed, has never entertained the smallest doubt on this head. What then shall I oppose to so ancient, so constant, so formal a testimony? I cannot imagine this nation to have fabricated these writings: how absurd would such a supposition be! Would not the prophecies themselves confute it? Would it not, further, be contradicted by so many passages which load that nation with ignominy, and the strongest reproaches for its disorders and crimes? That nation, therefore, has neither counterfeited, altered, nor suppressed, any thing, since it has preserved these records, so humiliating to itself, and so favourable to the great society of which Christ was the founder.

Shall I have recourse to the wild supposition, that the harm onybetween the events and the predictions is the effect of chance? It is impossible to find, in the coincidence of so many and such various circumstances,

any appearance of casualty.* A more rational occasion for scepticism occurs to my mind:—Can I clearly prove to myself, that the predictions which are so striking, did really precede, for the space of five or six centuries, the events which they foretold in such plain and decisive terms? Am I acquainted with any contemporary authorities, which attest, that the authors of whom I am writing, really existed five or six centuries before Christ?—I do not engage myself in this learned and laborious inquiry. I perceive a nearer, an easier, and a safer road; one indeed which will bring me to a more decisive conclusion.

I have learned from history, that a Greek version of the writings in question was made in the reign of a king of Egypt;† I consult this famous version, and I find the same predictions contained in it, as in the original text.

This version, made by interpreters‡ of

* Vide P. 16. Chap. iv. Phil. Paling.

† Ptolomæus Philadelphus.

‡ The seventy interpreters.—Whatever has been reported concerning them, and their version, by the false Aristeus, may be

that same nation with whom the original text was deposited, was composed near* three centuries before the birth of Christ I am therefore positive, that the predictions in question have preceded, for near three centuries, the events which they foretold.

I have not the least reason to suspect, that the members of the society founded by Christ have inserted in this version those predictions so favourable to their cause. The nation, which so scrupulously guarded the original text, would certainly have exposed so daring an imposture. Besides, it would have been necessary to interpolate all the writings of the teachers of that nation who mention these prophecies, and who make no scruple of referring them to the Deliverer that was to come.

If the Creator of man, desirous of afford-

found in the History of the Jews by the learned Prideaux. It will always remain beyond dispute, that this celebrated version was made by Jews of Alexandria, for the use of those of their nation who lived amongst the Greeks, or spoke the Greek language. The substance of this critical discussion is to be seen in the excellent general preface to the New Testament of Berlin, p. clvi. and clvii. of the edition of 1741.

* The Septuagint version was made 271 years before Christ.

ing him a greater number of proofs concerning his future destiny, chose to add to the persuasive *language of signs*, the *prophetic or typical language*, he would give, I should imagine, the same expressive character to that language which he gave to that of miracles. He would make it so peculiar to the future events which it was to represent, as to prevent its application, in an exact or complete manner, to any other events. He would have spoken at such times, and under such circumstances, that it would be impossible for the human mind to deduce, in a natural manner, from those times, and those circumstances, the future existence of these events. And, because men might have counteracted the accomplishment of these events, had the language been perfectly clear, it would therefore be interspersed with shades and light: sufficient light to perceive, when the events happened, that it was the legislator who had spoken; but not sufficient to excite the criminal passions of men.

All these characters I discover in the book which I have before me. I observe in the same book many other scattered pre-

dictions, which are scarcely less expressive than those just mentioned.——*They have pierced my hands.—They part my garments among them, and cast lots for my vesture, &c.**

Who could have revealed to man this so distant view of futurity, except He to whom all ages are but as an instant, and *who can call these things which are not, even as though they were.*

* Psalm xxii.—Had I dedicated these inquiries to that illustrious people, the antient and faithful guardian of these sacred oracles, I should have enlarged further on the prophecies, and should have presented them in a different point of view. I have however, perhaps, said enough to convince a judicious unprejudiced reader, how decisive the two principal predictions (to which I confined myself) are in favour of the Messiah whom the Christians acknowledge. The modern teachers of this unfortunate people do not, in my opinion, succeed better than their predecessors, in their attempts to invalidate the consequences which the Christian legitimately draws from these admirable prophecies.

This great subject has been profoundly investigated by various apologists for Christianity. The excellent writings of Abbadie and Jaquelot, which are easily met with, may be consulted. And I refer my reader to a note in the third chapter, for my method of inquiry relative to the prophecies.

BOOK V.

CHAP. I.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE FOUNDER.

IF it be true that eternal *wisdom itself* has vouchsafed to descend from heaven to earth to enlighten mortal man, I must necessarily find the indelible traces of that adorable wisdom, in the character of his divine messenger.

I meditate deeply on this great subject. I begin by tracing to myself the characters which this doctrine ought to have, that it may appear to me conformable to the purest lights of reason, and that it may add to these lights, those which the wants of

human nature required, and which human nature of itself could not supply.*

That man is a social being, and that many of his principal faculties have for their direct aim the social state of man, must be readily granted. The gift of speech alone would suffice to convince me of it.

The doctrine therefore of a heavenly Messenger should be essentially connected with the great principles of social union. It must tend directly to make perfect and ennoble every natural sentiment, which unites man with his fellow creatures. It will multiply and increase indefinitely the ties of humanity, and represent to man the love of his fellow-creatures as the most fruitful and purest source of his present and future happiness. In effect, is there a principle of social life more refined, more noble, more active, more liberal, than that sublime benevolence, which in the doctrine of the gospel is indicated by that expressive and unusual term charity ? † *A*

* See Part xvi. Chap. iii. Phil. Paling.

† I do not say *new*, altho', in a certain sense, I might be *allowed* that expression. Cicero has said, in that beautiful pas-

new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.—By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.—Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend.—And who were the *friends* of Jesus, but the whole race of man, the inhabitants of every clime, throughout every age, from the creation of the world? in such repeated precepts of brotherly love, in that sublime law of charity, can I fail to discern the founder and legislator of universal society? In that great example of benevolence, in that voluntary sacrifice, can I fail to discern the truest, the most generous friend of mankind?

The heart of man is the universal principle of all his affections. It is the heart, therefore, which requires to be made more perfect. A celestial doctrine will not confine itself merely to the regulation of the

sage, lib. de finibus, V. 23, In omni autem honesto, nihil est tam illustre, nec quod latius pateat, quam conjunctio inter homines hominum, & quasi quædam societas, & communicatio utilitatum, & ipsa caritas generis humani, &c.—That philosopher first spoke the voice of charity to the age he lived in.

external actions; it will direct its happy influence to the inmost recesses of the heart. *Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* What new doctrine then is that which condemns a crime only meditated, as if it had been actually committed? It is the doctrine of that incomparable philosopher, who accurately knew the frame of man, who knew that an impression made too powerfully on certain parts of the organ of thought, may insensibly stimulate to the commission of actual offences. A physiologist will find no difficulty in comprehending the force of this remark. The senseless voluptuary would feel it, if the impurity of his imagination had not clouded his understanding.—*But I say unto you* —it is a *master* that speaks, and what a master! *He spoke as one having authority.* —*A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man, out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.* What simplicity in these expressions! how fraught with

sense and information is the thought?—*The good man!*—it is not the great man; it is more—*His good treasure—his heart!*—the heart of the good man.

There exists no passion more adverse to the social spirit than that of revenge, nor is there any that lords it more tyrannically over the heart of which it has unfortunately taken possession. A celestial doctrine will not therefore confine itself merely to the reprobation of so dangerous and so unworthy a sentiment in a social being; it will not be content with requiring of him the sacrifice of his own resentments; still less will it allow the law of retaliation: it will inspire him with that kind of heroic enthusiasm which instructs him to render good for evil. *Ye have heard that it has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth—But I say unto you—Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.—For if ye love them which love you, what reward*

*have ye ?** And what is the motive which is presented to us by the author of a doctrine so fit to elevate the heart of a social being? *That ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*—The being then that is truly social, diffuses his benefits around in imitation of Providence—he does good to all; and, if he acts on general principles, the exceptions to these principles are still benefits, and even the greatest benefits. By a judicious distribution of the good things which he holds from providence, he knows in what proportion he is to distribute them, according to the merits of the objects; he gradually rises to the summit of perfection, because he obeys a perfect master—*Be ye perfect.*——A doctrine which forbids even the idea of revenge, will undoubtedly enjoin reconciliation also, and the forgiveness of personal injuries,

* I know that these, as well as many other sublime expressions in this admirable discourse, were addressed more directly to the disciples than to the people at large. But who is ignorant that the doctrine of Christ requires the same happy dispositions in all who profess it?

The truly social being is too elevated to be inaccessible to reconciliation and pardon. *If thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* The God of peace, who is the God of universal society, requires peaceful sacrificers. *On the altar*—it would profane the altar—*Before the altar*—it will remain there but a moment.—*How often must I forgive my brother? Seven times?* was the question of the disciple, whose soul was not yet arrived at a state of perfection;—*Till seventy-times seven*, was the answer given by HIM who is always exercising forgiveness, because there is always something for him to forgive——A doctrine which breathes nothing but charity, will undoubtedly make toleration one of the first laws of a social being; for it would be contrary to the nature of the thing itself were a social being intolerant. Carnal-minded men would dispose of the fire from heaven; they would say—*Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from* heaven and

consume them?—What is the answer of the friend of mankind, to this fanatic, this inhuman request? *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* What! shall men who call themselves the disciples of this good master, shall they persecute their fellow-creatures? because they have the misfortune of not assigning to the same words the same ideas which they do, are they to employ fire and sword?—But I will pursue the subject no further. Light begins to break in upon us, and will soon, it is to be hoped, entirely disperse the darkness that formerly overwhelmed us.

A religion from heaven ought to enlighten man, and shew him what are real goods. Man is a being endowed with a variety of senses and affections—his desires, *his heart*, must have their objects. But what objects should such a doctrine present to a being whose existence on earth is but for a short time, and whose future mansion is heaven? That being whose immortal soul carries its hopes far beyond time, and extends them even to eternity itself, should

he set his mind on objects which time destroys? Should a being, endowed with such discernment, mistake the changeable colours in the drops of dew for the lustre of the ruby? *Lay not up to yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* He who is happy enough to have formed such a treasure, will feel the truth of this assertion. His heart is *entirely given up to it.* That man is *already seated in heavenly places—he hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and he shall be filled.*

CHAP. II.

CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT.—OBJECTION.—ANSWER.

IF a divine religion enjoined a particular kind of worship, that worship would have some relation to the nature of an intelligent creature, and would be no less adapted to the excellence of a moral being, than to the majesty and spirituality of the *Being of beings.*—*Learn what these words mean—I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*—MERCY—the thing *signified*, and not the *sign.*—*The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*—*God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.*——*In spirit—in truth*—These two words comprehend every thing, and cannot be ex-

plained away: but they may be forgotten: blind superstition never knew them. *In spirit—in truth!*—how admirably do these two words characterise that universal religion, which is here placed in opposition to a local religion, given to one family only, that it might be the depository of those great and eternal truths, so useful and necessary to all ages and to all nations. *

But because man is a sensitive being, a religion which would reduce every thing to mere spirituality, would not be well adapted to such a being; it would be a charac-

* I mean the important truths of natural religion. Shall I reproach that family, which was the depository of these truths, for their ignorance in the science of reasoning? Would not this family have altered that sacred deposit, or have been supposed the authors of it, had they been skilled in dialectics? I meditate with pleasure on this conduct of Providence. It appears to me very remarkable, that the best, the most concise, and the most ancient abridgment of the law of nature, should be exhibited to us by that family who have possessed it for upwards of thirty-two centuries, and whose great legislator invented neither metaphysic nor logic. What elevated ideas does this legislator give of the *first cause! I am that I am!* What a volume to comment upon, in all worlds, in all times, and in all eternity! Amazing thought, which could proceed only from him, who alone could say *what he is!* The first legislator announced the *Jehovah, the God of armies!* The second legislator renounced *the one only good being the God of mercies!*

teristic of a celestial doctrine to affect the senses by something external. An external worship will therefore be enjoined by that doctrine. Ceremonies * will be instituted, but in a small number; the noble and expressive simplicity of which will be exactly adapted to the particular end of the institution, and to the spirituality of internal worship.

Again; since one of the natural effects of prayer is to remind man of his weakness, his misery, and his wants; and since another natural effect of that religious act is to form the mind of man to the disposition most proper to overcome the forcible impression of sensible objects; since, in fine, prayer is an essential part of that rational homage which the intelligent creature owes to its Creator; a celestial religion will exhort man to prayer, and even prescribe it as a duty to him; will prescribe to him a † formulary, and instruct him to avoid vain repetitions. And, as the soul cannot remain

* The sacraments.

† The Lord's Prayer.

a long time wrapt up and absorbed in that deep attention which prayer requires, the formulary prescribed will be very short, and will contain only the most necessary petitions, expressed in the most energetic terms, of the most extensive signification.

It will also be conformable to the spirit of a divine religion, to rectify the judgments of man concerning moral evil, and, in general, concerning the ways of Providence. Modern philosophy soars very high on this subject, and yet does not reach the height of that popular philosophy, which, under the most familiar images, conveys the most important truths.—*Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it tares? Wilt thou that we go and gather them up? Nay, answered the lord, lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.* Unskilful husbandmen are desirous to hasten the harvest, and weed their fields before the

time. But if they would maturely consider the high importance of this precept, they would patiently wait for the time of harvest.

If self-love be the universal motive of the actions of man; if there be no surer way of guiding man to what is good, than by the hope of reward, and fear of punishment; if a celestial religion must proclaim a system of morals founded on motives sufficiently powerful to influence men of every rank; such a doctrine will undoubtedly set forth to mankind a future state of happiness or misery, relative to the nature of moral actions; it will afford the most splendid ideas of a future happiness, and will paint in the most hideous colours a future misery. And, as these are objects of such a nature, that they can be exhibited to men only by comparisons taken from objects with which they are familiar, the religion of which I am speaking will frequently have recourse to such comparisons; which will be either *feasts*, *marriages*, *crowns*, *joys for evermore*, *rivers of pleasure*, &c.; or, on the other hand, *weeping*, *gnashing of teeth*, *darkness*, *a worm which dieth not*, *a devouring fire*, &c. Finally, since men con-

tinually and spontaneously expose themselves, for a momentary pleasure, to years of misery and pain, the threats denounced by this religion cannot be too forcible; and it will be suitable to the spirit of the whole system, to set forth the pains of the wicked as eternal, or at least as of an indefinite duration. But in exhibiting to sensual man this hideous gulf, the *doctrine of life* will, at the same time, magnify the compassion of the *merciful Father of man*, and point out, on the brink of the precipice, a gracious and benevolent hand, which—If, in the Supreme Being, justice be goodness guided by wisdom; if Almighty benevolence essentially require the improvement of all intelligent and sensitive beings; if punishments could be the natural means of leading to perfection; if they were, in the moral economy, what remedies are in the natural; if *there be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth: if there be much love where much has been forgiven*—my heart leaps for joy—I am lost in admiration—what a wonderful chain of doctrines! The compassion of the *one only good is infinite*

—*he desireth not the death of a sinner;* but *that he should turn from his wickedness and live.—He desireth!*—and shall HE desire in vain?

But can a doctrine which is to guide men solely by their own interest, can this be a celestial doctrine? Ought it not rather to direct men to good by the pure and disinterested love of that which is good? A soul, desirous of perfection, may easily be seduced into this conclusion by the sublime idea of perfection. Let us here, however, be on our guard against a dangerous and specious illusion:—a doctrine which would present no other motive to mankind, than the philosophical consideration of the satisfaction resulting from the practice of virtue; would such a doctrine be sufficiently universal and efficacious? Is every mind calculated to feel the pleasure arising from intellectual and moral perfection? Would that pleasure, so refined, so pure, so angelical, suffice in every case, and particularly where the sou is under the dominion of the most vehement passions? What do I say? Is man an angel? Is his body of an ethereal substance? Are not *flesh and blood* its com-

position? He who made man, knew what suited him, better than the philosopher, who fondly pursues an imaginary perfection. The Author of all true perfection has adapted to the most important ends the surest and most powerful means; he has formed his precepts conformable to the nature and wants of that mixed being which he wished at the same time to encourage and to controul.—"To the wise man he has spoken with the "voice of wisdom; to the people, with that "of sentiment and authority. Great and "generous souls will act in comformity to "order by their love for order. Souls of a "different cast may be guided to the same "end by the hope of rewards or fear of "punishment.* In recalling man to moral "order, the Author of man recalls him at "the same time to reason; he says, *Do* "*well, and thou shalt be happy; sow, and* "*thou shalt reap.* It is the faithful lan-"guage of truth, the relation of the cause "to the effect—A seed sown in the earth "grows up," &c. †

* Essay on Psychology, Pref.

† Ibid. Ch. liv.

If man be in his nature a mixed being; if his soul exercise all its faculties by the intervention of a body; if the sensation of personality be the result of the action of certain parts of that body;* a doctrine revealed from heaven will not be content with teaching man the immortality of his soul, it will also point out to him the immortality of his being; and if this doctrine should draw its comparisons from what happens to the plants, the language spoken to the people would be familiar, but very expressive; and the philosopher would discover under this veil a pre-ordination, which would affect him so much the more as it will be more consonant to the principles of psychology. Here, as in other places, he will admire the astonishing coincidence of nature and grace, and will discover, in this celestial doctrine, the perfection, and the completion, of true philosophy. *The hour is coming in the which all that are in the grave shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life; they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation.*—

* Vide Part xvi. Ch. i.

Resurrection of life!—happy immortality! It is not then the soul alone which will enjoy this felicity, it will be the whole man.—*I am the resurrection and the life*—astonishing words! language which the ear had never heard; expressions, the majesty of which bespoke the *prince of life.*—*I am the resurrection!* he commands death, and tears *from the grave her victory.* What might I not further add? for this subject is inexhaustible, and I have only taken a very superficial view of it. A doctrine derived from heaven ought to be in such perfect harmony with the nature of man, and his various relations, that the very experience he will have of the precepts and maxims of this doctrine will of themselves sufficiently evince the truth of it. The teacher of such a doctrine will not shrink from such a test. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.* What practical truths those few words lay open to me!—*The will of my Father!*—the love of order, the observance of those relations which bind man

to his fellow-creatures, and to all other beings—*The will of my Father.—What he wills is good, agreeable, and perfect.—Of myself!*—The Redeemer, who in other places appeals to *his works*, submits himself here to the daily experience of every individual; for the teacher of mankind knew man; he knew that conscience would speak a plain language; he knew that by following the laws of reason, man would soon learn that ETERNAL REASON had spoken. *He will know whether his doctrine came from God.**

* Let the reader, whose soul is susceptible of exquisite feelings, and capable of discerning the true, the good, the beautiful, the pathetic, the sublime, read over again and again the 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th chapters of the gospel of the beloved disciple of Christ; and, in the midst of his tender emotions, let him propose this question to himself;—Whether these admirable discourses could have proceeded from a mere mortal? I do not add an impostor; for the reader I have in view would be too much affected, too much moved and agitated, to admit for one single instant, the odious suspicion of imposture! How sincerely do I regret that my plan does not allow me to attempt an analysis of this last discourse of the best and most respected of masters; of that master *who was going to give up his life for his friends*, and who employed his last moments in comforting and instructing them! But my admiration carries me too far, when it suggests the idea of such a task. I feel myself unequal to it. Such discourses could be analysed by those only to whom the

master said, *he no longer gave them the name of servants*, &c. How sincerely do I pity that man who is so void of feeling or understanding, or so much enslaved by his prejudices, as to remain insensible to such discourses, wherein the Benefactor of mankind painted himself with a truth and simplicity so affecting and so majestic!

CHAP. III.

DOCTRINE OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES OF THE FOUNDER OF CHRISTIANITY; PARALLEL BETWEEN THESE DISCIPLES AND THE SAGES OF PAGANISM.

HAVING thus far attended to the voice of divine WISDOM; if I now listen to those extraordinary men whom she inspired, I shall still believe I hear her voice, for it is still divine WISDOM that speaks. I shall not therefore inquire whence these plain, artless fishermen have been able to dictate to mankind a system of morals so far superior to what reason had till then conceived; a system in which all the duties of man are comprised; which refers them all to their true source; which forms into one family all the different societies dispersed over the earth; which binds closely together all the members of that

family; which connects it with the great family of celestial intelligences; and which proclaims HIM the father of those families, whose goodness extends from the sparrow to the cherubim. I shall readily acknowledge, that so sublime a philosophy did not take its rise in the turbid waters of the Jordan; and that so bright a light did not break out from the thick darkness of the synagogue.

I shall be confirmed still more in this opinion, if I have sufficient patience or courage to peruse the writings of the most famous teachers* of that lofty and fanatical

* The Rabbins and Thalmudists, the ancient doctors of the nation. *Thalmud* signifies doctrine; *The Thalmud* is the collection of all the *traditions* on the doctrine, the laws, and ceremonies of that people. Two of these collections have the title of Thalmud; one of them is that of Jerusalem, the most ancient; the other, that of Babylon, a compilation, supposed to have been made in the fifth century of our era.

Amongst the modern teachers of that nation, the most learned are far from adopting the dreams of the ancient Thalmudists. They attempt to purify the doctrine more and more, by separating from it the base alloy introduced into it by the barbarity and ignorance of the ages of darkness. Several traits of the doctrine of the ancient Thalmudists may be seen in some apologists of Christianity, and chiefly in Houtteville, vol. i. p. 188. edit. 1765.

society; and if I compare their writings with those of the men whom they persecuted with such fury, because their virtues irritated and offended them. What a monstrous farrago of dreams and visions! what absurdities heaped upon absurdities! what licence of interpretation! what a total forgetfulness of reason! what insults to common sense!

I afterwards direct my views towards the sages of Paganism. I open the immortal works of Plato, Xenophon, and Cicero, and I observe with joy these first glimmerings of the light of reason. But how weak, unsteady, and confused they appear! what clouds overshadow them! Night is scarce past. Day has not yet begun. The *day-*

I shall, however, observe, that the efforts of the learned of that nation, to purify and perfect their doctrine, will be vain; they will never completely succeed, if they do not add to it *that* supplement, so necessary, and so natural, which Christianity furnishes, and which their own law so evidently supposes. I cannot flatter myself, that this feeble essay of mine on Christianity, will engage any of the learned of that nation to examine with close attention, and with the utmost impartiality, a doctrine which *holds out to them the promises of the present life*, and the most express promises *of that which is to come*: but my heart is full of hopes for them, which I shall ever entertain, and of the *most ardent* desire that those hopes may be fulfilled by the *Father of light*, and author of every perfect gift.

star from on high has not yet appeared. But these sages hope for and expect its rising.*

I cannot withhold my admiration from these great geniuses. They have a just claim to it; they consoled human nature groaning under superstition and barbarity; they were in some degree the precursors of that reason. which was to *bring to light life and immortality.* I could willingly, if I dared, apply to them, what a writer, who was still more than a great genius, said of the prophets, *They were lights shining in a dark place.*

* See the second Alcibiades of Plato, where he makes Socrates speaks thus:—*We must wait for the coming of some personage, who will teach us our duty towards God and mankind.—When will that time be,* replies Alcibiades; *and who will he be that will instruct me?—It will be he who taketh care of you,* answers Socrates.

And in Phedon.—*To come to the knowledge of these things in this life is impossible, or at least extremely difficult, unless we can arrive at this knowledge by more certain means, such as a divine revelation.*—And again, in another part of the Epinomides, the wise pagan, in speaking of the worship of the Deity, thus expresseth himself:—*Who is he that will be able to instruct us in it, if God is not his guide?*

But, the more I study these sages of Paganism, the clearer does it appear to me that they had not attained to that perfection of doctrine which I discover in the writings of *the fishermen* and *the tent-maker*. In the sages of Paganism, the whole is not homogeneous, nor of the same value: they sometimes say admirable things, and seem almost to be inspired; but these things do not go so near my heart as those which I read in the works of these men, whom human philosophy had not enlightened. In these I find a pathos, a gravity, a force of sentiment and thought; I had almost said, a strength of nerves and of muscles, which I do not meet with in the others. The first penetrate the very recesses of my soul; the latter affect only my understanding. Then, how greatly do the former exceed the others in the powers of persuasion! the reason is, because they had themselves received fuller conviction—*They had seen, heard, and touched.*

I meet with many other characteristics, which create an immense difference between the disciples of the Messiah and those of

Socrates,* and still more those of Zeno.† I stop to consider these discriminating circumstances; and those which strike me the most in the former, are, that entire inattention to self, which leaves no other sentiment to the soul than that of the importance and grandeur of its object, and to the heart no other desire than that of faithfully fulfilling its duty, and doing good to mankind; that patience, the result of reflection, which enables us to support the trials of this life, not only because it is great and philosophical to do so, but because they are the dispensations of a wise Providence, in whose eyes resignation is the most acceptable homage; that elevation

* The wisest of the Grecian philosophers. He lived about four centuries before Christ. It is of him that Cicero said, *That he had brought philosophy down from heaven, to introduce it into cities and houses*, &c. He gave himself up entirely to moral philosophy, &c. Plato and Xenophon were his disciples.

† Another Grecian philosopher, who established the sect of Stoics. This sect received its name from a portico where Zeno taught. He made the sovereign good to consist in living in a manner conformable to what he called *nature*, and in following the dictates of reason. He lived two centuries before Christ Of all the sects of antiquity, that of the Stoics has produced the greatest men.—*Could I for one instant forget that I am a Christian*, says the author of the Spirit of Laws, *I should wish to be a Stoic.*

of thought, that dignified courage, which render the soul superior to all events, because they render her superior to herself; that constant adherence to what is good and true, which nothing can stagger, because that *truth* and *good* are not the result of opinion, but rest on the demonstration of the *spirit and of power;* that just estimation of things—But how infinitely are such men above my feeble praise! they have drawn their own characters in their writings; it is there they must be considered: and how is it possible to draw any parallel between the disciples of divine wisdom, and those of human philosophy?

CHAP. IV.

PRIMITIVE CHURCH.——ITS PRINCIPLES, MANNERS, &c.——EXPRESS OR TACIT CONCESSIONS OF THE ADVERSARIES OF CHRISTIANITY.

IN what respect have the admirable sayings of the sages of Paganism been beneficial to mankind? Did they eradicate one single prejudice from the people, or throw down a single idol? Socrates, whom I call the institutor of natural morality, and who was in Paganism the first martyr of reason; the astonishing Socrates, did he destroy the idolatry of Athens, or produce the slightest revolution in the manners of his country?

Within a very short time after the death of the Messiah, in a dark corner of the earth, there sprang up a society, of which the sages of Paganism had not even foreseen the possibility. The characters of a Socrates and

an Epictetus, are to be met with almost every where in that society.* All its members were closely united by the bonds of fraternal love, and the most pure and most active benevolence. They are all actuated by the same spirit, that is, the spirit of their founder; they all adore the Great Being *in spirit and in truth;* and the *religion* of every one of them consists in *visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keeping themselves unspotted from the world.—They eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. Nor was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles feet, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.* In a word, I seem to contemplate a new

* Epictetus, a Grecian philosopher, and one of those who did most credit to the sect of Stoics, lived in the first century, was slave to an officer of Nero, who used him cruelly, and died in an extreme old age. It is said of him, that of all the ancient philosophers, his doctrine was that which came the nearest to Christianity. His manners were milder and more sociable than those of the greater part of the Stoics. He said, that all philosophy was summed up in these words—*bear* and *forbear*. He was a living example of this admirable practical philosophy.

terrestrial paradise, but of which *every tree, is a tree of life.*

Where then is the latent cause of this great moral phænomenon? By what prodigy, unknown to all preceding ages, do I behold, in the midst of corruption and fanaticism, a society spring up, whose governing principle is the love of mankind, whose end their happiness, whose motive the approbation of the sovereign judge, whose hope life eternal?—But am I not mistaken? The first historian* of this society has perhaps exaggerated their virtues, manners, and actions. But the men of whom he is speaking soon made themselves sufficiently known in the world. They were surrounded, observed, persecuted by multitudes of enemies, and envious persons; and, if the human character be made manifest by adversity, never surely could men be better known than these. If their historian, therefore, had either exaggerated or misrepresented the facts, is it not natural to imagine that he would have been contradicted by those suspicious and vigilant contemporaries, so strongly prejudiced against them,

* St. Luke—See the Acts.

and not actuated by the same interest? I cannot, at least, with any appearance of justice, suspect the testimony which I find in that famous *letter** of a magistrate, equally enlightened and virtuous, and to whose nice inspection and vigilant observation a great prince† had committed the conduct of these men. This very remarkable testimony was given to this new-formed society, by those very persons who forsook and betrayed it; and it is this very testimony (which the governor himself does not contradict), that he lays before the prince.

These witnesses affirmed, that "all the "error or the fault of this society consisted "in these points; that on a certain day, "they assembled before sun-rise, and al-"ternately sung verses in praise of Christ,

* Pliny the Younger, Lett 97, B. x.—It is well known, that Pliny was of consular dignity, and governor of Bithynia and Pontus.

† Trajan.—This great prince, who did not approve of the new society, because he feared its progress, was, however, so struck with the account given by Pliny, that he forbid the odious method of secret and anonymous accusations against the presumed members of this society, and would not even admit of an inquisition of police.—*They must not be enquired after*, he answers to Pliny; *but punished, if they be accused and convicted.*

"as though he had been a God; that they "engaged by oath, not to commit any "crime but to abstain from theft and adul- "tery, to adhere strictly to their promises, "and not to deny money deposited in their "hands; that afterwards, it was their cus- "tom to separate themselves, and then "meet again, to eat their frugal repast to- "gether."

It seems to me, as if I had not taken up another author, but that I was still reading the historian of that extraordinary society; yet they who delivered so favourable, so advantageous a testimony to its principles and manners, were men* who, confident of the protection of the prince and his ministers, might have calumniated that society with impunity. The governor does not controvert this evidence. We may presume, then, he has nothing to oppose to it. Consequently, he tacitly acknowledges these principles and manners. *Is it the name alone which is to be punished* (he adds,) *or the crimes to which this society is ad-*

* Apostates, who abjured Christianity, and returned to Paganism, to escape punishment, or to preserve or obtain temporal advantages.

dicted? He therefore, clearly insinuates, that it was the *name* which was punished, rather than any real *crimes?* What an extraordinary coincidence between two writers, whose religious tenets and views were so different! What a monument! What an eulogium? The governor was contemporary with the historian. Both view the same objects, and almost in the same light. Is it possible that truth should not be found here?

But the governor brings a charge against this society of men—and what is this charge? *An obstinacy, an usuperable obstinacy, which seems to him worthy of punishment. I have judged it necessary* (he adds,) *to wrest the truth by force of tortures. I have discovered only an evil superstition carried to excess.*

Here the governor views things in a different light from the historian. *An evil superstition!*—it is no longer *facts* or *manners*, which the governor blames; it is a *doctrine*; and to see this doctrine in a right point of view, required more practice in this kind of observation than the governor could boast, I pay great attention also to

the fortunate contrasts, in this place, between the two historians; it contributes, as much as the rest, to bring out and display the truth in its genuine colours. It is not as a secret favourer of the new sect that the governor forms his judgment; it is in defiance of all his prejudices of birth, education, philosophy, politics, &c. I am pleased to be informed by him of this *insuperable obstinacy!* What then is the cause of this obstinacy, which defies the force of torture? Is it any particular, any private opinion? No.—It is facts, and facts submitted to the judgment of every sense.

I discover another evidence in favour of the new society, which does not strike me less than that of the governor of Bithynia; I mean the testimony of the satirical and ingenious* Lucian, one of the best writers, and wittiest men of the age, and one of the chief magistrates of a great province of the empire. *The legislator of the Christians* (he says,) *persuades them that they are all brethren. They secede from us; they abjure the gods of the Grecians. They*

* Lucian de morte Peregrini.

adore their crucified teacher, and conform their lives to his laws; they despise riches; every thing amongst them is in common: and they are constant in their faith. To this day they adore their great man crucified in Palestine. I particularly pause at that remarkable expression, *persuades them they are all brethren;* and I instantly recall to my mind those incomparable words of their master, *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* Brotherly love, therefore, was the criterion of the first disciples of that mild religion, one of the principal laws of which is charity; and the Pagan writers themselves confirm a fact, which affords so clear an evidence in favour of the celestial origin of this admirable doctrine.*

* Were it consistent with the nature of this work, I could quote many other favourable testimonies, given by Pagan authors, to the virtues and manners of the primitive Christians. They may be seen in most apologists, Colonia Bullet, &c. may be consulted.

CHAP. V.

SUCCESS OF THE TESTIMONY.—REMARKS ON THE MARTYRS.

THIS rising society increases in strength every day, it spreads itself, and wherever it is established, I behold corruption, fanaticism, superstition, prejudices, and idolatry, prostrate before the cross.

The capital of the world is soon peopled with these Neophytes; it is over-run with them, *multitudo ingens;** they overflow the largest provinces of the empire: and I learn all this from the same governor, † the ornament of his country, and of his age, he was governor of two extensive provinces, Bithynia and Pontus. He writes

* Tacitus Hist. of Nero.

† Pliny the Younger, in the same letter.

thus to his prince:—"This affair seemed "to me worthy of your consideration, on "account of the multitude of those who "are involved in this danger; for a con- "siderable number of persons, of all ages, "orders and sexes, are, and will be every "day included in this accusation. This "contagion has not only infected the "towns; it spreads into the villages, and "into the country.—This is most certain, "that the temples are almost deserted, the "sacrifices neglected, and the victims "without purchasers."

Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Philippi, Colossus, and a number of towns, more or less considerable, exhibit crowds of citizens who embrace this new doctrine. I find the history of the foundation of these particular societies, not only in the historian of the great society of which they were a part, but also in the *letters* of that indefatigable disciple who founded them.

I see the oral and written tradition correspond in this respect perfectly together, and both of them concur to preserve and strengthen the evidence. I see the disci-

ples of the second century go hand in hand with those of the first; I see Iræneus * receiving from Polycarp † that which this last had received from one of the first ocular ‡ witnesses; and this chain of tradi-

* One of the most learned of the Greek fathers. He was born in Greece, according to some, in the year 97; and according to others, in the year 120 or 140. In his youth he had been a disciple of Polycarp, was bishop of Lyons, and is supposed to have died in 202. "The tradition of the apostles (this father says) has spread itself over the whole universe; and all they who search after the sources of truth, will find this tradition to be held sacred in every church. We might enumerate all those who have been appointed bishops to these churches by the apostles, and all their successors up to our days. It is by this uninterrupted succession, that we have received the tradition which actually exists in the church, as also the doctrine of truth, such as it was preached by the apostles."—Vide note ch. i. part iv.

† Bishop of Smyrna, and the head of the churches in Asia. He had been a disciple of St. John, and took great pleasure in reciting the discourses which he had heard from the mouth of that apostle. "Polycarp" (says Iræneus) "teaches the same "things which the disciples have taught; he has discoursed "with several of those who have seen Christ.—I have seen him "in my youth, for he lived a great while, and suffered the most "glorious martyrdom in a very advanced age."

‡ "I could" (says Iræneus again) "mark out the very place "where Polycarp taught; I could describe his manner of life, "and whatever characterized his person; I could still rehearse "the discourses which he held to the people, and whatever he "related concerning his conversations with John, and with "others who had seen the Lord. Every thing he says of his

tional testimonies is lengthened, without interruption, through the following ages, &c.

Princes, and their ministers, exercise cruelties, unheard of in the most barbarous nations, on this innocent, this harmless society; and it is in the midst of these horrid persecutions that the society takes root, and propagates itself more and more.

And yet, it is not this natural effect of persecution which engages my attention, so much as this new species of martyrs. Violent contradictions may irritate and exalt the soul. But these thousands of martyrs, who expire in the most cruel tortures, are not martyrs of *opinion*; they die voluntarily to attest *facts*.—I know there have been martyrs to opinion. Such have existed almost in every age, in every country. There are even now some unhappy regions, where the wildest superstition ty-

"person, miracles, and doctrine, he gives as he had received it "from the ocular witnesses of the word of life. Every word "of the holy man on this subject, was exactly consonant to our "scriptures."—Eusebius, B. v. chap. xv. and xx.—Vide the notes of Mr. Seigneux on Addison's work, pages 228, 229, vol. 1. of the first edition.

rannizes; but the disciples of the Messiah are the only persons whom I ever heard had given up their lives for the attestation of *facts*.

I still further observe, that those who die so courageously in support of these facts, are not attached to their belief either by birth, education, authority, or any temporal interest. On the contrary, this belief shocks every principal they had received from birth, education, and authority, and affects still more their temporal interests. There is nothing, then, but the strongest conviction of the certainty of the facts, that can furnish me with an adequate cause for such unexampled fortitude, in voluntarily submitting to torments, and frequently to a most cruel death.

Finally; after three centuries of painful toils, trials, and tortures; after having, for three centuries, combated with the arms of patience and charity, this society triumphs; the new religion ascends the throne of the Cesars; the idols are overthrown; and Paganism expires.

CHAP. VI.

CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT.—WAYS OF PROVIDENCE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.

WHAT an astonishing revolution has been the subject of my contemplation! Who are the men who have effected it? What obstacles have they had to surmount? *A poor man who had not where to lay his head*, who passed for the son of a carpenter, who ended his life by an ignominious death, was the founder of this religion, which triumphs over Paganism and all its monsters.

This man chose his disciples from amongst the lowest class of people; the chief part of them from simple plain fishermen: and it is such men as these that he commissioned to publish his religion over

all the earth.—*Go and preach to all nations.* —*Ye shall bear witness of me to the farthest ends of the earth.*

They obey the voice of their lord and master; they publish to all nations the doctrine of life; they attest *the resurrection of the crucified man:* the nations believe in his name, and are converted.

This is the great moral phenomenon which I have to explain; a revolution more extraordinary than all those recorded in history, and of which I am desirous to assign the efficient cause.

I take a rapid view of the state of the world before this great revolution took place. Two predominant systems of religion prevailed in it, Theism and Polytheism.

I am not speaking of the Theism of the Pagan philosophers; that very limited number of sages, who, like Anaxagoras or Socrates, attributed the origin of all things to one eternal spirit. These sages did not form a body; and they left the common people immersed in prejudices and the

grossest idolatry. The philosophers themselves had attained the knowledge of some important truths; but they laid open their treasure only to the adepts.

I am speaking of the Theism of that nation, so extraordinary and so numerous, separated by its laws, its customs, even by its prejudices, from all other nations, and who supposed that their ancestors received their religion and laws from the hands of God. That nation is firmly convinced, that this religion, and these laws, are established by signal and innumerable miracles; it is strongly attached to its external worship, customs, and traditions; and, although much fallen from its former splendour, and subject to a foreign yoke, it still retains all the pride of its ancient liberty, and believes itself to be the sole object of the attention of the Creator. This people retains a sovereign contempt for every other people, and professes to wait for a deliverer who will subject the whole world to their nation.

Polytheism was in every other country the predominant and almost universal reli-

gion, it varied under different forms, according to the climate, and Genius of the people; it was favourable to all, even the most monstrous passions; giving a full career to the heart of man, though it sometimes checked his hand; flattering every sense, and associating the *flesh with the spirit.* It exhibited to the people the example of its gods; and these gods were monsters of cruelty and impurity, and of course must be worshipped with cruelties and debaucheries. The eyes of the multitude were fascinated by its inchantments, its prodigies, its auguries, divinations, and pompous ceremonies. Such a religion builds altars to vice, and digs the grave for virtue.

How will fishermen, assuming the character of missionaries, be able to persuade the Theists, that this external, majestic, ancient, and venerable worship is no longer what God requires of them, and that it is abolished for ever; that all those august ceremonies, so mysterious, so well calculated to captivate the senses, *are only the shadow of those things, the substance of which is now presented to them?* How will it be

possible to force them to acknowledge, that those traditions, to which they are so united in their hearts and minds, are only the *commandments of men*, and that *they destroy that law* which they believe to be divine? But, above all, how shall fishermen convince these proud and disdainful Theists, that this despised and abject man, whom their magistrates have condemned, and who expired on a cross, is himself the great *Deliverer*, who had been foretold to them, and for whom they so impatiently waited; that they are not the sole objects of the extraordinary favour of Providence, but that all the nations of the earth are called to partake of it?

How shall fishermen eradicate from the imagination of the sensual and coarse *Polytheist*, that heard of gods, as numerous as the various objects of nature? What method shall they take to spiritualize his ideas, to disengage him from the dead matter within which he is immersed, and *convert him to the living god?* How shall they wrest him from the seducing pleasures of

the senses, and a life of voluptuousness ?* How shall they purify and ennoble all his affections ? How shall they make of him a sage, and more than a sage ? How shall they restrain his heart as well as his hand ? And, above all, how shall they persuade him to pay homage to a man stigmatized by a most ignominious punishment ? And how shall they, in the eye of the Polytheist, *convert the folly of the cross into wisdom* ?

How shall these heralds of the *crucified man* engage their new followers to forsake their temporal interest; to submit to a life of contempt, humiliation, and ignominy; to defy all kinds of punishments and tortures; to resist all temptations; and to persevere, even unto death, in a doctrine which insures no recompence but in another life ?

* When we consider the horrid description which the apostle of the Gentiles gives of the customs of the Pagans, Rom. chap. i. we are almost inclined to believe, that the account given of them is exaggerated; until we consult the contemporary historians, Tacitus and Suetonius. The same accounts, and still more abominable, are to be found in the poets of these times.—Vide Fleury, manners of the Christians, page 27, Brussels edition, 1753.

By what means are these simple fishermen become *fishers of men?* Whence has it happened, that, in less than half a century, so many, and different sects and nations, have embraced the new doctrine? How is *this seed of mustard become a great tree?* And how has this tree over-shadowed such immense countries? I know that in general men are not enemies to severity of doctrine in point of morals, because it supposes an uncommon effort of mind, and because men have a natural taste for perfection; not that they always seek after it; but they are fond of it at least in speculation. A voluntary poverty, a great disinterestedness, a painful and laborious life, attract easily the attention and esteem of men. They are very ready to admire all this, provided you do not oblige them to the practice of it.

If, therefore, this new doctrine published to the world had been purely speculative, I can easily conceive that it might have gained the esteem, and even the admiration, of some people. They would have viewed it in the light of a new sect of philosophy; and those who professed it, might have ap-

peared to them sages of a very peculiar stamp.

But this doctrine is not merely speculative, it is chiefly practical, in the strictest and most literal sense of the word. It is the most elevated kind of practical heroism; it enjoins an entire self-denial, combats every passion, regulates every affection, checks every desire, requires a total surrender of our heart to the love of God and of our neighbour, demands continual sacrifices, and those the greatest of sacrifices; and promises no other rewards, but those which the eye cannot see, and which the hand cannot feel.

That the charms of eloquence, the attractions of riches, the splendor of dignities, and the influence of power, may gain credit to a doctrine, and bring over to it many proselytes, I can easily conceive.

But the doctrine of the *crucified Saviour* is taught by men void of art, and in the lowest circumstances, whose eloquence consists more in things than in words; by men who preach doctrines opposite to the most

received opinions; by men of the lowest class, and who hold out to their disciples no other expectations in this life, than sufferings, tortures, and the cross; and yet these are the men who triumph *over flesh and blood*, and convert the universe.

The effect was prodigious, rapid, permanent; it exists to this day. I can discover no natural cause to produce this effect, and yet there must be a cause, and a great cause: Where then is this cause? *In the name of the crucified man, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the blind see, the dead are raised.* I am no longer at a loss; every difficulty vanishes; the problem is solved; the legislator of nature has spoken; nations have heard him; the universe has acknowledged its master. He who could see *in the mustard-seed the lofty tree*, was then the Messenger of that God who hath *chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*

The weak things of the world!—Here I invite that reader, who can elevate his mind to the contemplation of the ways of

Providence, to meditate with me on the admirable methods of divine wisdom, in the establishment of Christianity.

A religion, the universality of which was to comprehend all ages, all places, nations, ranks, and situations in life; a religion which made no distinction between the crowned head and that of the lowest subject; a religion formed to disengage the heart from terrestrial things, to ennoble, to refine, to sublime the thoughts and affections of man; to render him conscious of the dignity of his nature; the importance of his end; to carry his hopes even to eternity; and thus associate him with superior intelligences; a religion which gave every thing to the spirit and nothing to the flesh; which called its first disciples to the greatest sacrifices, because men whom religion teaches *to fear God alone*, can undergo the severest trials; a religion, in short, (to conclude my weak conceptions on so sublime a subject,) a religion which was the perfection or completion of natural law, the science of the truly wise, the refuge of the humble, the consolation of the wretched;

a religion so majestic in its simplicity, so sublime in its doctrine, so great in its object, so astonishing in its effects;—such a religion, I say, was not to be given to men by a messenger clothed in the majesty and pomp of kings. It was fitting that he who was to command the elements, and death itself, should *not have where to lay his head;* that he should take upon himself the humble title of the *Son of Man;* that he should be appointed *to serve, and not to be served, and that he should wash the feet of those who called him* LORD *and master.*

The weak things of the world!—If this Saviour was to have a precursor, it was also in the order of this sublime œconomy that this precursor should lead a life of poverty and frugality; that his manners should be austere, his actions irreproachable; that, clothed in coarse raiment, he should precede the Prince of Life, who was himself concealed under the humble veil of flesh. This precursor was also to recall men to the most essential duties of human nature, and teach them a doctrine preparatory (as it were) to the more complete and more elevated doctrine of the great sovereign

teacher; it was, in fine, his commission to announce and characterize, by the most striking features, Him who was *to come after him.*

The weak things of the world!—In conformity to these views, so far excelling all human views, the Messenger of the Most High was to be born of a virgin, in an obscure family, but descended from illustrious ancestors, to whom the most magnificent promises had been made by ancient predictions. This birth was to be proclaimed to shepherds; and the celestial heralds, commissioned to celebrate by their hymns these glad tidings, were to instruct these shepherds in the object and the extent of the mission of Christ—*On earth peace, good-will towards men.*—*Good-will*—not towards one single elected nation, but towards all the nations of the world.—*Good-will*—not to one single generation, but to every generation to come; the benevolence of the BEST AND GREATEST of Beings comprehends all mankind, because he is the father of all.

The weak things of the world!—In this marvellous dispensation of Providence, what numberless circumstances still present themselves to me, all directed to divert the attention of man from human grandeur, towards that which is alone truly great! This child, *the desire of all nations*, is born in a manger, the supposed son of a carpenter: For was he, at whose feet all thrones were one day to be cast down, was he to borrow his glory from the splendor of thrones? Was he, to whom all nature and all minds were to become subject, was he to be invested with the power of kings? And, because he could give all power to his disciples to command (even as he himself did) all nature, and all the hearts of men, therefore his disciples were to be chosen from amongst fishermen and publicans; and these were the men whom he was to commission to teach all nations, and reform the universe.

CHAP. VII.

GENERAL DIFFICULTIES:—THAT THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL HAS NOT SPREAD SO MUCH AS THE HIGH IMPORTANCE OF ITS END SEEMED TO REQUIRE, &c.:—THAT THE GREATER PART OF CHRISTIANS MAKE BUT A SMALL AND SLOW PROGRESS IN VIRTUE.—REPLIES.

AM I not, however, precipitate in my judgment? Am I not hurried on too rapidly towards belief and admiration? Has the universe acknowledged its master? Has this salutary doctrine reformed the universe?—I cast my eyes around, and I see with astonishment, that this celestial light illuminates but a small part of the earth; and that a thick darkness overspreads the rest. And, even in the enlightened parts, how many dark spots do I discover!

This difficulty, however, may be easily surmounted.—If this doctrine of life is to be as permanent as the present state of our globe, what are seventeen centuries, when compared to the total duration of the world? Perhaps no more than seventeen days, or seventeen hours, to as many ages. Shall I judge of the duration of this religion, as I do of the duration of empires? Every empire *is as the grass of the field*, and all the glory of empire *as the flower of the grass: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth;* but the religion of the Lord *doth not pass away.* It will outlive all empires. *Christ must reign till God hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed, is death.*

On a further examination of this difficulty, I find that it answers precisely to another, which sometimes presents itself, concerning the unequal distribution of the various gifts and endowments both of the body and the mind. On considering attentively this second difficulty, it leads to a palpable absurdity. The gifts of the mind, as well as those of the body, depend on a *multitude* of physical circumstances, con-

nected with each other, and this connexion reaches back even to the first instant of the creation. For every man, therefore, to have possessed the same endowments, and in the same degree, it would, in the first place, have been necessary, that men should not have been born one from another; for how much may not the primitive organization of the human frame be modified by successive generations? It would have been requisite, in the second place, that all men should have been born in the same climate, should have fed on the same aliments, should have led the same life, received the same education, and lived under the same government. For how can I deny, in a greater or less degree, the influence of all these circumstances on the mind? In this case, the slightest cause carries its influence far beyond every thing I am able to conjecture.

To effect, therefore, this perfect equality of gifts between every human individual, it would have been requisite that they should all have been cast in the same mould; that the light and heat of the earth should have been every where equal; its productions

every where the same; that their should have been neither mountains, nor valleys. It would be endless, were I to attend to and dwell on every circumstance of this nature.

To a mind devoid of penetration, numberless difficulties of this nature will present themselves. But the absurdity of them would be striking, were such a mind able to analize them. The mind of man generally skims the surface; averse to toil and labour, it wishes always to avoid the pain of thought and deep meditation; and sometimes it dreads still more the discovery of *truth*.

If, therefore, it was not consistent with this state of things, that all men should posses the same endowments, or the same share of them, why should I be surprised that they have not all the same belief?

But is this holy religion, which appears to advance by such slow degrees, and which, agreeably to the wish of every benevolent heart, should enlighten the whole world; is this religion to remain confined for ever within its present limits?—This is by no

means necessary. By how many various ways, which Providence has perhaps prepared, may it not one day break out with splendor through the narrow limits to which it is now confined? How many striking, how many irresistible proofs of its truth may there be still buried in the bowels of the earth, or hidden under ruins, which Divine Wisdom may cause to be discovered at the time appointed by that same All-seeing Wisdom! How many revolutions, in the great political bodies which divide our world, may hereafter occur, when the Supreme Wisdom shall see fit! That people, the most antient, the most extraordinary of all people; that people, dispersed and disseminated, as it were, among the great mass of all mankind, for these seventeen centuries, without being ever incorporated with that mass, without having even formed itself into a distinct nation or government; that people, the faithful depository of the most antient prophecies, and at the same time a perpetual and living monument of the truth of the new prophecy; may not that people, at an appointed time, become, through the hand of Providence, one of the chief instruments of its designs in favour of this reli-

gion,* though these designs be still unknown to that people? That chain of events, which served by certain unknown principles to connect causes with effects even of a miraculous nature; may it not likewise extend to certain other effects? and may not these unknown principles produce changes in the state of human society, even more considerable than that which was effected seventeen centuries ago?†

* May that people, so venerable by its antiquity, and from whom the *health of all people cometh*, soon open their eyes to the light, and with the Christians celebrate *the Holy one of Israel, the head and consummation of our faith!* May the *wild olive-tree* never forget it has been *grafted on the true one!* May the children of Christ no longer bar up their hearts against that unfortunate people, whom God has loved, and still loves, and seems to have entrusted to their care, and placed under their protection, and whose conversion will one day be our comfort and joy! Would to God, that my earnest desire might hasten and bring forwards those happy moments; and that it were in my power to prove to the numerous descendants of Abraham, the ardent prayers formed in my heart for their re-establishment! *Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid! but rather, through their fall, salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now, if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles: how much more their fullness? For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world; what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?* Rom. Chap. xi. ver. 11, 12, 15.

† See what I have said on the Miracles, in Book i. Cap. iv. v. vi. and Book ii. Chap. ix.

If this doctrine be not productive of greater moral effects, amidst the number of those who profess it, shall I call in question either its perfection, or its want of sufficient motives? But, is there any doctrine, the principles of which have a more direct tendency to the happiness of universal society, and that of all its members? Is there any which offers motives better calculated to influence the mind and heart? It elevates mortal man to the throne of God, and carries his hopes even into eternity.

But the legislator of the universe, in promulgating this sublime law, has not transformed the intelligent beings to whom he gave it into mere machines. He has given them the physical power either to follow or infringe this law; he has placed in their hands the decision of their own destiny; he has laid before them good and evil, happiness and misery.

It is no objection to the doctrine of Christ, that all those who profess it are not saints; it would not be less absurd to object against philosophy, that all those who profess it are not philosophers! But does it follow from

this, that philosophy is not well calculated to make philosophers? Am I to judge of a doctrine merely by its effects? Would it not be more equitable to judge of it by its principles, its maxims, its motives, and by the appropriation of all these things to the views which I discover in this doctrine? If, notwithstanding the excellence of this doctrine, and its being so well adapted to its purpose, I perceive that it has not always answered its end, the only just conclusion I can draw from that circumstance is this—that the prejudices, the passions, and the constitution of man frequently weaken or destroy the impression which that doctrine tends naturally to produce on the soul. I ought not to be surprised; for I can easily conceive, that a free and intelligent being cannot be necessarily compelled by motives, and that reasons are not causes which have certain and necessary effects, like weights, levers or springs. I ought further to observe, that all those, who make an external profession of a doctrine, are not always really and effectually convinced of its truth.

If, therefore, it follow, from these observations, that a certain doctrine can produce

but a very small number of those who may be called truly wise, I shall not be much surprised, if I reflect, at the same time, that to attain to a high degree of perfection of any kind is very uncommon; and that this is particularly the case with respect to moral excellence. But at the same time I can conceive, that as gold is no less gold, although mixed with heterogeneous matter; so virtue, although in a less degree, is no less virtue. And, as I could wish to be always equitable, I must give this doctrine credit for all the good effects, however inconsiderable, which it produces, and for every disorder it prevents. And, more particularly, were I considering a doctrine which commands us to do good without the least ostentation, to do *good works*, rather than *splendid works*; if this doctrine require also that *the left hand should not know what the right hand doeth*—then I should clearly see the impossibility of calculating all the benefit which may have accrued to society from the promulgation and the practice of such a doctrine.

CHAP. VIII.

ANOTHER GENERAL DIFFICULTY:—THAT THE PROOFS OF CHRISTIANITY ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY WITHIN THE COMPASS OF ALL MEN's UNDERSTANDING.—ANSWER.—SUMMARY OF THE AUTHOR's REASONING ON MIRACLES AND TESTIMONY.

I FIND another difficulty to encounter:—A doctrine which was to be preached to all nations of the earth; a doctrine which was to give to the whole race of mankind a full assurance of immortality; a doctrine which was an emanation from eternal wisdom itself;—ought not such a doctrine to have rested on proofs which men of all times and all places should have understood with equal facility? and ought not the possibility of scepticism to have been carefully precluded? And yet, what an extensive knowledge is requisite, to collect, to understand and to

give a proper value to these proofs! how deep, laborious and intricate the inquiry! how few the persons capable of such a continued application! what uncommon parts, sagacity and discernment, are absolutely necessary to compare the proofs, to estimate the degree of probability which each of them posseses, to judge of the sum of probabilities taken together, to weigh the proofs against objections, to ascertain the force of the objections relatively to each kind of proof, to solve these objections, and from the whole to deduce such conclusions as appear to approach nearest to certainty! Was a doctrine which required so many extraordinary qualifications of the mind and of the heart, such profound knowledge, and so much inquiry; was such a doctrine well adapted to every individual? was it calculated to give them reasonable assurances of an happiness to come? could it remove their doubts, strengthen and increase the hopes of reason, and bring *life and immortality to light?*

I am fully sensible of this difficulty, and do not wish to shrink from it. I see it in all

its force; yet do not think it insurmountable. Let us then analyse it carefully.

By the force of evidence* I have been compelled to acknowledge, that man cannot, by the light of his own reason, attain to the assurance of a future state. It was therefore by extraordinary means alone that he could arrive at this certainty. I can, without difficulty, conceive that the acquisition of new faculties, or perhaps only a great improvement of his present faculties, might have placed this future state within the compass of his intuitive knowledge, and might have admitted him in some manner to contemplate it, as he does his present state. I further conceive, that an internal revelation, or external miracles, might afford to man this certainty, so necessary to his happiness, and thus compensate for the imperfection of his actual faculties. But, the acquisition of new faculties, or even a great increase of perfection in the actual faculties of man, would have made him a very different being from that which is known to us by the name of man; and, as all the parts of our world

* Chap. iii. Part xvi. of the Phil. Paling.

have relation both to each other and to the whole system, it is very evident, that if man, the chief being of our planet, had been changed, he would no longer have borne his proper natural relation with the planet where he was destined to pass the first moments of his duration. A more piercing sight, a far more delicate touch, &c. must have exposed him to continual inconvenience. . . . . .

. . . . . .

It would have been requisite also, to have altered the œconomy of the planet, to have placed it in a proper relation with the new œconomy of man.

The difficulty, therefore, considered in this point of view, amounts to this—Why has not God made a different earth? And this leads to another question—Wherefore has not God created a different universe? for the earth is in connexion with the universe, just as man is with the earth. The universe is the whole of all created beings. This whole is systematic and harmonious; there is not a single part, which bears not a relation to the whole. Can I presume to

say, that, in the work of the Supreme Intelligence, there exists any one thing which has no connexion with the work, and which at the same time constitutes a part of it? If, notwithstanding the weakness of my powers and faculties; if, notwithstanding the great imperfection of my instruments, I still discover so many connexions and relations, and so much harmony, between the various parts of the world which I inhabit; if these connexions are multiplied, combined, and diversified, in proportion as I multiply, combine, and vary my observations and experiments;—how great is the probability that, were my faculties and instruments incomparably more perfect, that I should discover every where, and even in the smallest parts, the same connexions and relations, and the same harmony! and this must necessarily be, since the greatest parts are always formed of the smallest, and these of others still more diminutive, &c. and *every whole* essentially depends on the order and proportion of the parts of which it is composed.

How unphilosophical, therefore, would it be to pretend, that the œconomy of man should have been changed, by the Author of the universe, in order to afford him a greater certainty of his future state? Neither would the desire of an internal revelation, to give him a full assurance of it, be less contrary to reason. Such a revelation must have been universal, or have extended itself to every individual, since this certainty of a future state was equally necessary to every single being.

But I have already observed, at the beginning of Chap. I. Book II. that it was suitable to the œconomy of man to be led by his senses and by reflection; now, supposing an internal and universal revelation, carried forwards from age to age, would such a revelation have been conformable to the present constitution of man? And if, from the first origin of things, it was ordained, that the happiness he was to enjoy in his future state should be the result of his reason employed on inquiries into the foundation of that happiness, how could he have applied his reason to this important in-

quiry, if an internal and irresistible revelation had thus rendered useless the exercise of this faculty?

Another extraordinary method still remained, which might conduct man to this certainty, so much to be desired, and which appears not to have been within the reach of his unassisted reason. This extraordinary means was that of miracles, palpable, striking, numerous, and diversified, duly connected with each other, and indissolubly united with such circumstances as might characterize them, and determine their scope and design. It is evident that this extraordinary mean was the only one (at least known to us) which made no alteration in the present constitution of man, and left free exercise to all his faculties.

But if miracles were designed to manifest to man the will of the Supreme Being; if they were, in some measure, the physical expression of this will; then evidently all men had an equal claim to this extraordinary favour; all men would have ardently desired to see these signs; and if, as I have

already remarked,* for the gratification of every individual, miracles had become perpetual and universal; how could they have retained their quality of *extraordinary signs?* What distinction would have remained between miracles, and the ordinary course of nature?†

It was therefore essential to the very nature of miracles, that they should be occasionally wrought, in certain places, and on certain times; now, this relation to time and place, this necessary relation, evidently supposes testimony, and oral or written tradition. Tradition required a certain language, which should be intelligible to those to whom this tradition was transmitted. This language could be neither universal, perpetual, nor invariable: such a language was no more agreeable to the œconomy of our planet, than a perfect resemblance, either physical or moral, between all the in-

* At the beginning of Chap. i. Book ii.

† I intreat the reader to recur to what I have said on this subject, in Book i. and ii.

dividuals of mankind. It was therefore a natural consequence of the vicisitude of human things, that the language in which the witnesses of the miraculous facts published their narrative, should one day become a dead language, and be understood by the learned only. Again—It was a consequence of the same vicisitude in the things of this world, that the originals of the narrative should be lost; that the first copies of these originals should be lost also; and that the latter copies should present a number of various readings; that a multitude of minute facts, and minute circumstances, well known to the contemporaries of the witnesses, and necessary to elucidate certain passages of the text, should be unknown to their descendants, as well as a variety of other information, more or less useful, &c. Finally—It was the natural consequence of the state of things, and of the nature of the human faculties, that an art* should be invented, the direct object of which should be the interpretation of the most important of all books. This refined

* The art of criticism, which might be called the logic of the scholars, or of commentators. Vide Book iii. Chap. viii.

art, therefore, was to take place, was to enlighten the *learned*, to disperse or lessen the clouds which obscured certain truths; and the learned were to enlighten and conduct the multitude.

It must not be objected here, that God, by an extraordinary intervention, might have prevented the decay of the language in which the evidence had been written; that by the same means he might have prevented the loss of the written evidence, the contradictions, the alterations, the various readings of the text:—I have already observed how unreasonable such an objection would be,* since it would be still supposing continued miracles, &c. I have also observed, that these contradictions, these alterations, these variations, of the text, do not affect the ground, or the substance of the evidence; and that it is by no means impossible to reconcile the passages in a satisfactory manner.†

I now come closer to the difficulty under

* Vide Book iv. Chap. iii.

† Vide Book iii. Chap. viii. and Book iv. Chap. ii. and iii.

examination. Since then the certainty of a future state could rest only on proofs of fact; since the nature and design of the miracles required that they should be wrought in certain places, and at certain times; it became a necessary consequence, that the proofs of a future state were to be submitted to the decision of reason, in the same manner as all other proofs of facts. The proofs therefore of a future state fell thus under the test of criticism, as much as any other historal facts: thus likewise they become the most important object of deep investigation; and it was a part of the plan of Providence, that the learned should collect these proofs, arrange them in a certain order, develope, elucidate them, and solve the objections which they would create. That they should compose from the whole particular treatises, and become interpreters to the people of these narratives, which contained *the words of eternal life.*

Let me now compress my arguments into a narrower compass. Man has two means of arriving at the knowledge of things; the senses, and reflection: neither the one nor the other of these two means, nor both to-

gether, could lead him to *a moral certainty* of a future state: they were too disproportionate to the nature of those things which formed the object of this certainty. This I have clearly proved.*——Man therefore could be led to this certainty only by some extraordinary means. But, it was an intelligent and moral being which was to be led —it was MAN; that is, a being endowed with certain faculties, and whose faculties were confined within certain actual limits. If, therefore, the extraordinary means, of which I am speaking, had consisted in imparting new faculties to man, or in enlarging the actual extent of his faculties, it would no longer have been man, who would have been led to the certainty in question; it would have been a being very different from that which man really is. It was therefore requisite, that these extraordinary means should be so far consistent with the present constitution of man, that, without creating the least alteration, it might be sufficient to convince him of a future state. These means were MIRACLES; for nothing could be better adapted to prove to man-

*Book xvi. Chap. iii. Phil. Paling.

kind, that the author of nature had spoken, than miracles. But had miracles been wrought in every place, and in every time, they would have fallen into the ordinary course of nature, and would no longer have been sufficient to ascertain, that the supreme author of nature had *spoken.** It became therefore necessary, that miracles should be wrought in certain places, and at certain times. They were, then, to be submitted to the rules of testimony, as are all other facts. Reason, therefore, was to apply these rules, and by this application to judge of the reality of the facts. And, Because these facts were miraculous, and because, to obtain belief, miraculous facts require a greater number of testimonies, and testimonies of superior force, it was agreeable to the nature of this species of proof, that it should be given by witnesses who united, in the highest degree, those conditions that establish, in the eye of reason, the credibility of any fact whatever;† I say, *of any fact whatever*, because it seems very evident to me, that miracles are

* Vide Book i. and Book ii. Chap. ii.

† Vide Book ii. Chap. ii.

not less facts, although those facts are not comprised within the sphere of the common laws of nature. I have already observed elsewhere,* that reason will acquiesce in those proofs of facts which the miracles afford, if, after applying to those proofs the rules of sound criticism and exact logic, they appear to be established on a solid basis.

I shall add but one observation more, and shall then, I apprehend, have cleared up the difficulty in question; Have I not in reality exaggerated this difficulty? Are such great parts, such extensive and elevated knowledge, requisite, in fact, to form a sound judgment of the proofs of the Christian revelation? In order to appreciate rightly the most palpable proofs, collected by the best writers, with as much order as perspicuity, in books which they have found means to adapt to all capacities, is it not sufficient to have an impartial mind, disengaged from the prejudices of false philosophy, an upright heart, and a moderate degree of attention? That a sensible reader

* Book ii. Chap. iii.

may form a proper judgment of any particular history, or doctrine, is it absolutely necessary for him to possess all the powers and all the knowledge of those authors who have collected the proofs of this history and this doctrine? To enable a jury to bring in a verdict, is it necessary that they should be possessed of the deep knowledge, the accurate information, and the great talents, of those who are appointed to preside on the bench.

Is it not necessary, on many occasions, to have recourse to those who are adepts in particular arts or sciences, and to depend in some degree upon their integrity and adroitness? should not the people have recourse to the learned, to direct and assist them in forming a judgment of the various proofs laid before them, to establish the truth and certainty of the Christian revelation? Besides, amidst these proofs, are there not some that may be easily comprehended by the most limited capacities? How admirably calculated is the moral excellence of Christ, to make deep impressions on virtuous and feeling minds! How much *does* the character of the institutor himself

excite the admiration and veneration of every sincere friend to truth and virtue! Much of the same sublimity of character appears in the conduct of the first disciples. What a life! What morals! What excellent models! What benevolence! What charity! Are such things beyond the reach of the multitude? And are these things destitute of power to influence their minds! They will not believe, perhaps, on the authority of so many proofs as a divine; but they will believe on those proofs which are most within their comprehension, nor will their belief on that account be the less rational, the less practical, or the less comfortable.

CHAP. IX.

CONTINUATION OF GENERAL DIFFICULTIES:—THAT THE DOCTRINE OF THE GOSPEL DOES NOT SEEM FAVOURABLE TO PATRIOTISM:—THAT IT HAS BEEN PRODUCTIVE OF GREAT EVILS ON EARTH.—ANSWERS.

IF it be further objected, that the doctrine of Christ is unfavourable to patriotism, and calculated only to enslave the mind, will not the faithful history of its establishment and progress prove immediately the falsehood of such an assertion? Could there possibly exist subjects more submissive, citizens more virtuous, souls more generous, and soldiers more intrepid, than the first disciples, dispersed over the empire; ever persecuted, ever humane, ever benevolent, and faithful to the prince and his ministers? If the purest source of true magnanimity results from a deep and lively sense of the dignity of our nature, what

must be the magnanimity and the elevation of a being whose views are not confined within the limits of time?

Shall I repeat what has been asserted, that the real and genuine disciples of Christ *would not form a state that could subsist?* But wherefore not? replies a true philosopher,* who well knew how to appreciate things, and who cannot be suspected either of credulity or partiality: "Why not? "Citizens of this profession being infinitely "enlightened with respect to the various "duties of life, and having the warmest "zeal to fulfil them, must be perfectly sen- "sible of the rights of natural defence. "The more they believe themselves indebt- "ed to religion, the more they would think "due to their country. The principles of "Christianity, deeply engraven on the "heart, would be infinitely more powerful "than the false honour of monarchies, than "the human virtues of republics, or the "servile fear of despotic states."

* Montesquieu, Spirit of Laws, lib. xxix. chap. vi.

Shall I exaggerate the evils which this doctrine has occasioned in the world; the cruel wars of which it has been productive; the blood it has spilt; the atrocious injuries it has committed; the calamities of every kind which attended this doctrine in the first centuries, and which broke out afresh in much later times, &c. ? But, shall I forever confound the ill use, or the accidental, nay perhaps the necessary consequences of an excellent thing, with the thing itself? Were these horrors authorised by a doctrine which breathes nothing but charity, meekness, and mercy? Were these crimes directed by a doctrine so pure, so holy? Was it the word of the Prince of Peace, which armed brothers against brothers, and taught them the infernal art of refining on every species of torture? Were the daggers sharpened, the tortures prepared, the scaffolds raised, the faggots lighted, by toleration?—No;—light must not be confounded with darkness, nor mad fanaticism with all-bearing charity. I know *that charity suffereth long, and is kind: charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not*

easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. No; *he that went about doing good,* did not put the murderous dagger into the hands of his children, nor dictate to them a code of intolerance. The mildest, the most compassionate, and the most just of beings has not* *breathed* into the hearts of his disciples the spirit of persecution, but has †*kindled* within them the divine fire of charity.

"To pretend" (says this eminent writer again,‡ whom I have already quoted, and whom I could quote continually), "to pre-
"tend to say, that religion is not a restrain-
"ing motive, because it does not always
"restrain, is equally absurd as to say, that
"the civil laws are not a restraining motive.
"It is a false way of reasoning against re-
"ligion, to collect, in a large work, a

* John xx, 22—A symbolical but very significative action.

† Luke xxiv. 32.

‡ Montesquieu, Spirit of Laws, lib. xxi.v. chap ii.

"long detail of the evils it has produced, "if we do not give, at the same time, an "enumeration of the advantages which "have flowed from it. Were I to relate all "the evils which have arisen in the world "from civil laws, from monarchy, and "from republican government, I might tell "of frightful things. Were it of no advan-"tage for subjects to have religion, it "would still be of some, if princes had it, "and if they whitened with foam the only "rein which can restrain those who fear "not human laws. A prince who loves and "fears religion is a lion, who stoops to the "hand that strokes, or to the voice that ap-"peases him. He who fears and hates re-"ligion is like the savage beast, that growls "and bites the chain, which prevents his "flying on the passenger. He who has no "religion at all, is that terrible animal, who "perceives his liberty only when he tears "in pieces, and when he devours."

With what satisfaction do I remark this profound and humane writer, this preceptor of kings and nations, tracing with his immortal hand the eulogium of that religion, which a well-disposed mind, the

more philosophical it becomes, the more it will admire! "Let us set before our eyes, "on the one hand, the continual massacres "of the kings and generals of the Greeks "and Romans; and, on the other, the de- "struction of people and cities by those fa- "mous conquerors *Timur-Beg and †Jen- "ghis-Khan, who ravaged Asia; and we "shall see, that we owe to christianity, in "government, a certain political law: and "in war, a certain law of nations; benefits "which human nature can never sufficient- "ly acknowledge.

"It is owing to this law of nations, that, "amongst us, victory leaves these great "advantages to the conquered, life, liber- "ty, laws, wealth, and always religion,

* Timur-Beg, or Tamerlane, emperor of the Tartars, and one of the most renowned conquerors, died in 1415, aged 71. He gained several victories over the Persians, subdued the Parthians, reduced the greatest part of the Indies, and brought into subjection Mesopotamia and Egypt. He triumphed over Bajazet, emperor of the Turks, and thus reigned over three parts of the world.

† Jenghis-Khan, one of the most illustrious warriors conquered the Mogul, and Tartars, and founded one of the greatest empires in the world; he died in 1226, aged 72.

"when the conqueror is not blind to his "own interest."*

How many domestic virtues, and acts of mercy exercised in privacy and retirement has this doctrine of life produced, and produces still! How frequently are the characters of a Socrates and an Epictetus met with under the garb of an ignoble artisan! if indeed that epithet can ever be justly applied to an honest man; and how superior the knowledge of this artisan, concerning the duties, and future destiny of man, to that of either of those two philosophers! God forbid that either injustice or ingratitude should harbour in my breast. If I enumerate the blessings which accrue from true religion, it is to her, I perceive, that philosophy itself is indebted for its birth, progress, and perfection. If the Father of *light* had not vouchsafed to enlighten mankind, can I venture to affirm, that I myself should not have been an idolater? Born perhaps in the midst of the most profound darkness, and of the most monstrous superstition, I should have remained immersed in prejudice and depravity; and in the

*Montesq. Book xxiv. Chap. iii.

works of nature, and my own wonderful frame, I should have seen little more than an irregular chaos. And if happily, or unfortunately, for me, I had elevated my mind so far as to entertain a doubt concerning the author of all things, concerning my present or future destiny, &c. that doubt would have been perpetual; I should never have been able to remove that doubt, which perhaps would have proved the torment of my life.

Can true philosophy, therefore, refuse to acknowledge the infinite obligations it has to religion? can it glory in loading it with charges which must recoil upon itself?—And can true religion, on the other hand, rise up against philosophy, and forget the important services which may be derived from it?

CHAP. X.

CONCLUSION OF GENERAL DIFFICULTIES:—OBSCURITY OF THE DOCTRINE, AND ITS SEEMING OPPOSITION TO REASON.——REPLY.

LASTLY; shall I attack the religion of Christ in its tenets? Shall I draw arguments from its mysteries, their incomprehensibility, their opposition (apparently at least) to reason?

But what right have I to require that all should be LIGHT in nature and in grace? How many mysteries are there in nature which I am unable to penetrate? What a multitude of these have I enumerated in the 12th and 13th Parts of the Philosophical Palingenesis, and how far from being complete is the catalogue I have there made of them! how easily might it be increased, *if I* thought proper! What grounds, there-

fore, have I to be astonished, at the obscurity in which certain doctrines of religion are involved? Is not this obscurity itself greatly increased by that darkness which envelopes so many of the mysteries of nature? How unphilosophical would it be, were I to complain, that God has not bestowed on me the eyes and intelligence of an angel, that I might penetrate into all the secrets of nature, and of grace? Have I the presumption to think, that, in order to satisfy an idle curiosity, God ought to have disturbed the universal harmony of nature, and placed me one step higher in the immense scale of beings? Is not my extent of knowledge sufficient to guide me safely in the path which is traced out for me? Have I not sufficient motives to pursue it steadily, and sufficient hopes to animate my efforts, and to excite me in the pursuit of my proper end? Even natural religion itself, that religion which I believe to be the result, and which I consider as the glory of my reason, that very system which seems to me so harmonious, so connected in all its parts, so perfectly philosophical; with how many impenetrable mysteries does it abound! The sole idea of a necessarily-existent be-

ing, of a being existing by itself, how unfathomable is such a thought, even to an archangel! Nay, even without reverting so far back as to that first Great Being which absorbs all comprehension, the soul itself, that soul which natural religion sooths with the hopes of immortality, how many insuperable difficulties does it present to me!

But these doctrines of the religion of Christ, which at first sight appear so incomprehensible, and even so repugnant to reason, are they in reality so much so as they appear to be? Have not men, too bigotted perhaps in favour of their own opinions, sometimes given false interpretations to the words of the founder, and of his first disciples? and have they not thus altered and multiplied the doctrines? Do I not take these interpretations for the very doctrine itself? I apply myself to the only pure source of all doctrinal truth, I attentively consider that admirable book, which strengthens and increases my hopes; I endeavour to find the true interpretation of it in itself, and not in the dreams and visions of certain commentators: I compare text

with text, doctrine with doctrine, each writer with himself, all the writers together, and the whole with the most evident principles of reason; and, having finished this serious, impartial, long-continued, and often-repeated examination, I find the supposed contradictions disappear, the shades grow weaker, light breaking forth from the midst of darkness, and faith frequently uniting with reason, sometimes soaring above it, but never * standing in direct opposition to its dictates.

* It is obvious, that the consideration of doctrines did not enter into the plan of a work, calculated for all Christian societies, in which I was to confine myself to the establishing the foundations of the credibility of revelation. But I shall here repeat what I said in the Anal. Essay, in concluding my exposition of the doctrine of the resurrection, Sect. 754.—"The explanation "which I have ventured to give of one of the chief doctrines of "revelation, proves that revelation is not repugnant to philoso-"phical ideas; and this explanation shews, that other doctrines "are equally susceptible of similar explanations, were they bet-"ter understood."

CHAP. XI.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE NATURE AND CONNEXION OF THE PROOFS.—CONCLUSION OF THE INQUIRIES INTO CHRISTIANITY.

THUS have I considered, in a philosophical light, the principal proofs of that revelation, which reason pointed out to me, as necessary to the happiness of mankind. I review these proofs distinctly in my own mind; I weigh them over again. I do not allow them to be separated; I take them collectively; I view them together; I evidently see that they form a *whole*, and that each principal proof is an essential part of this whole. I discover a subordination, a connexion, a harmony between all the parts, and a tendency in each to one common centre. I place myself in that centre, and thus receive the various impressions which arise from all the points of the

circumference. I feel the effect of each particular impression, and that of the *whole*. I unfold the particular effects, I compare them together, and the general effect of this combination of evidence acts most forcibly on my mind.

I perceive then, that this powerful effect on the mind and heart would be almost annihilated, if, instead of taking the proofs collectively, I took each of them separately, and did not unite them again together; the effect would still grow weaker, if I reduced these proofs to miracles alone.

My method is natural, and seems to come to the point by the shortest line. I will here briefly recapitulate it:—After having laid my foundations in the physical and moral constitution of man,* as it is known to us by experience and by reasoning, my business was first to inquire, Whether it was consistent with the analogy of this constitution, that man, by the sole force of his reason, should arrive at a sufficient certainty respecting his future destiny?† And, as it

* Chap. i. ii. Part xvi. Phil. Paling.

† Chap. viii. of this Part.

appeared evident to me that this was not possible, it was natural to inquire, in the next place, Whether the Creator of man could not afford him this desirable certainty, without changing his present constitution. This great question led me,* by a road no less philosophical than direct, to the subject of miracles; for the question was, first, to examine, whether God himself had spoken; then, how he had spoken; by whom, and to whom, he had spoken.† &c.

But as, agreeably to my principles, miracles are nothing more than a particular species of language, and that language is nothing more than a collection of signs, which by themselves have no signification; I was then to consider the design or object of this extraordinary language, which it seemed to me that the legislator of nature had addressed to mankind. I was to consider also the moral character‡ of those extraordinary men who had been commissioned

* Book i.

† Chap. i. ii iii. Book ii.

‡ Chap. ix. Book ii.

to interpret this language to mankind,* the prophecies which had foretold the mission of a celestial messenger,† the doctrine of that celestial messenger, and the‡ success of his mission, ** &c.

By thus bringing together, and comparing the *external*†† and *internal*‡‡ proofs of Christianity, this important consequence results to my mind;—that there exists no ancient history so well attested, as that of Christ;—that there are no historical facts established on so great a number of proofs; on proofs so solid, so striking and so various, as those on which the religion of the Divine Messenger is founded.

* Chap. ii. Book ii.

† Chap. v. Book iv.

‡ Chap. i. ii. iii. of this Book.

** Chap. v. and vi. of this Book.

†† The proofs which the miracles and prophecies, the character of our Saviour, and that of his disciples, exhibit, are called the *external* proofs. They are exterior to the doctrine considered in itself; but they all concur with the doctrine in establishing the same fundamental truth.

‡‡ The *internal* proofs, are those drawn from the nature of the doctrine itself; that is, its excellence, and fitness to the wants of human nature, &c.

I have endeavoured to explore the inmost recesses of my heart, and, having discovered no secret motive there which should induce me to reject a religion so well calculated to supply the defects of my reason, to comfort me under affliction, and to advance the perfection of my nature, I receive this religion as the greatest blessing that Heaven in its goodness could confer upon mankind. And I should still receive it with gratitude, were I to consider it only as the very best and most perfect system of practical philosophy.

F I N I S.